Gould, Gerald

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THE ENGLISH NOVEL OF TO-DAY

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BY

GERALD GOULD

JOHN CASTLE
7 HENRIETTA STREET, STRAND, LONDON.
1924

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MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS book does not discuss, one by one, all the books by all the authors sufficiently important in contemporary fiction to merit critical discussion : that would be impossible. My purpose has been to trace tendencies, to estimate influences, and to hazard the sort of prophecy which is implied in the framing of general principles. I will say little here about the bewildering mass and variety of the subject-matter, nor will I linger over my regret that I have done—as I inevitably must have done—some injustice to individuals. These matters are better left to the concluding chapter, for the reader can then judge for himself how far excuse is legitimate and apology necessary.

I have chosen both authors and books for their value as types and indications as well as on their intrinsic merits, and in few cases have I attempted to consider more than one or two

representative works of any one author. I have particularly refrained from attempting any re-estimate of authors whose position was established at the beginning of the century: my business is with the contemporary movement. As a rule, and except for some special reason of illustration or contrast, I have indeed omitted mention of anyone who had published a novel before 1900: the most conspicuous departure from this rule is my discussion of Miss May Sinclair's work: and that was rendered compulsory by the active modernity of her mind, by the way in which she tackles the new methods as they arrive, and illustrates where she does not set the fashion.

Of course, the discussion of the contemporary has one obvious drawback. The present persists in becoming the past; novels to which I refer as their authors' latest will have been superseded as such (one hopes) before so very long. But there is no evading this difficulty. It is part of the subject. I date this August 1924, and can put it forward as nothing but a survey of the fiction which can be called contemporary at that date.

Finally, let me explain that this volume is an expansion of a series of articles contributed to the " Observer " at the suggestion of Mr. J. L.

Garvin, whose word is inspiration. I can never be sufficiently grateful to him for giving me the opportunity. I only hope I have not proved too unworthy in the execution. I have incorporated a good deal of matter contributed to other papers, especially to "The New Statesman," for which I wrote a page on novels every week for four years, and to "The Saturday Review," for which I have for more than two years been doing the same. I desire to express my gratitude and acknowledgments to the editors concerned. No man was ever more fortunate in his editors.

GERALD GOULD.

August 1924.

I

INTRODUCTORY

THE splendours of the Victorian age (which our young men deride but do not rival) gave way, like the splendours of the Elizabethan, to the curiosity and self-torture of the Metaphysicals. That is what is the matter with us still, and more than ever. The sexual preoccupations of Ford's genius or of Fletcher's, the far-fetched metaphors of Crashaw and Donne, have their parallels in certain of our novelists and poets. The reaction from wide, easy, insolent achievement and satisfaction is towards that self-contempt which contemns others; intellectual intricacies are sought as the expression of spiritual dubieties, and the high brow goes with the low view. Already in the 'nineties the reaction was beginning—nay, in the 'sixties; but, at that earlier stage, the lilies and languors, though they necessarily had all the charm of the naughty, had still

some of the repulsiveness of the silly. By the 'nineties, there was greater reality in the movement. The term *fin de siècle* had more than a temporal meaning—just as, to-day, *les jeunes* are young in other things than years. But the splendours continued to prevail. A shrill note had forced itself into the orchestra—there was impatience among the second fiddles—but the volume of sound was still superb. There was a great roaring of young lions then : now those lions will roar you as gently as any sucking-dove. Mr. Hardy was a heart of controversy, Henry James a moving cloud ; Mr. Kipling, Mr. Wells, Mr. Zangwill, dazzled with flash and scintillation ; the fame of Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Conrad stirred, or was about to stir, in the womb of Mr. Garnett's appreciation ; Mr. Bennett was—somewhat grimly, as one who bides his time—a young man from the North. Nowadays, Mr. Hardy speaks with the doomful and majestic authority of a past master : Henry James, years before he died, was hidden from most of us in the mist of his own method. Of their successors, Mr. Kipling and Mr. Wells have taken to history ; Mr. Zangwill and Mr. Bennett give chief place to plays or essays ; Mr. Galsworthy has summed his main achievement in a saga ; Mr. Conrad, alas, has died as

these words are printed. I speak, of course, generally, and in the rough: I do not forget "Jinny the Carrier," "Riceyman Steps," and a few more that might be mentioned with them; but half-a-dozen swallows do not make an Indian summer. The broad fact is that many writers, not yet old, who flared like comets round the turn of the century, are content to whisper to this generation the enchantments—not, it is to be hoped, the last enchantments—of the middle-aged. I say it in reverence, not in dispraise. The very eminence and permanence of established fame set a limit to speculation. These great writers we know; but "another race hath been, and other palms are won." Who are the runners now, and who the runners-up?

The note of decadence, faint and frigid among the late Victorians and the Edwardians, is among the Georgians too obvious to be ignored. Yet even to say that is perhaps, at this stage, to take too much for granted. Presented with novelty, we are bound to ask ourselves whether the eccentricities are not after all revelations. And even if we label the dominant schools wayward, that is not to condemn them as negligible. The Metaphysical poets were, some of them, very great poets: the parallel holds.

In the blank misgivings, the artificial energies, the immitigable inquiries, of the "new" fiction, we may find something precious and unique, something that only our own age could have achieved. "I am not John of Gaunt, your grandfather; but yet no coward, Hal." *Habent sua fata* . . . and, if their fates, their merits. But, in truth, the danger is not that we should dismiss too lightly the little gods of the moment, but that we should exalt them unduly. Because, simply *as* our contemporaries, they must provide us with something of which their predecessors could not know (Swift, it will be remembered, noted the deficiency of Homer in the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England), we must not set them up as greater than the great. The critic's function is double—to appreciate, but also to estimate. To do the latter we need a standard: in judging novels, as in judging poetry, we cannot afford to forget Matthew Arnold's method of the grand tests. And by that method we are driven to conclude that the abundant cleverness of the moment is off on the wrong tack. We have numerous—almost innumerable—good writers, but few immensely good: few that will stand even the hint of comparison with the giants, with Fielding

and Thackeray, with Dickens and Meredith.

There is an enormous output of the sound, solid, unexceptionable second-rate—competent work, written for a market (which it finds) and not for immortality (which it misses). But not by this, nor by the ordinary " best-seller "—which may be, as literature, either good or bad, but never owes its success to either that goodness or that badness—shall we judge justly the turn and trend of the novelist's art. To learn these we must go to the " schools."

For the only claim that the new could sustain against the old would be that of a new idea. Obviously, for instance, Mr. Lawrence's work will not bear comparison with Thackeray's —in Thackeray's *kind*: Mr. Lawrence's own kind is what we have to estimate. Only, when we do consider kinds, we discover the inferiority of the new to be not the mere consequence of poorer gifts in the individual writer, but something stamped deep in what the individual writer is attempting, in the very nature of his artistic purpose. The old masters saw, and painted, life in the thick—in the round: concrete, whole, alive: men and women, towns and villages, with the good air flowing about them. The new masters (I give them the word: to deny them mastery in their own vein would be

obscurantism) start with a theory ; and life never starts that way. They trust an abstraction, an explanation, not the grand inexplicable fact. Tracing motive, they fall into the error of those Victorian utilitarians who thought that if you had traced the history of a thing you had revealed its essence. We hear too much of instinct, too little of flesh and blood. " Instinct," as Falstaff said, " is a great matter " ; but it is not the whole. Mr. Lawrence believes so much in domination and antagonism that he seems not to believe in men and women—the first act of faith that God requires of the artist. Nor is there any justification to be found along the lines of Meredith's :

> Unnatural ? My dear, these things are life ;
> And life, some think, is worthy of the Muse.

For actually life is just what these things are not. They occur *in* life, but they are no substitute for it. Life contains them ; they do not explain life.

The movement back to uneasy introspection, begun, as we have seen, more than a generation ago, may be a sign of transition or a warning of doom. It was implicit in the changing conditions anyway—for the failure of the nineteenth century's material triumphs to provide spiritual

regeneration had driven men's thoughts back upon themselves—but the unnatural strain of five years' war accentuated it. It is not that writers are wrong to use the symptoms which morbid psychology discusses : Shakespeare did that, three hundred years before Freud. Lear's sexual images, the jokes Hamlet makes to Ophelia, are analysable on Freudian principles : the point is that Shakespeare did not start with the principles—he started with the creation of Lear and Hamlet. Man may be no very magnificent animal ; but he was made for something better than to illustrate a theory.

The discussion of the contemporary novel, then, must take for its point of departure the contrast between the great tradition (of Fielding and Thackeray) and the new self-conscious, self-questioning schools. Minor groupings and lines of cleavage are of course discernible. Mr. Compton Mackenzie's example is responsible for two kinds, neither of them essentially new but both nowadays much overdone—the story, generally minute in detail, of a boy's progress through school and college towards Bohemia : and the *picaresque*. Mr. Beresford is head and front of a group which gives to fiction the colour of autobiography ; but then he comes also, with Miss May Sinclair and Miss Rebecca

West, under the psycho-analytic head ; he has attempted the sociological and succeeded in the fantastic ; he cannot be labelled. Miss Sinclair again, though the influence of Vienna and Zurich is dominant in her later books, has been influenced also by Miss Dorothy Richardson—an author whom I cannot understand. There is, in pungent protest against decadence (and yet is the craving of the cultured for rural crudities so primitive itself ?), a group of the earth earthy : Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith is of it, and Miss Tennyson Jesse. Then there are fair casual flowers, isolated oddments of perfection, dropped here and there, unclassifiable : Mr. David Garnett's " Lady into Fox " and Mr. William Gerhardi's " Futility." Among short story writers, Princess Bibesco, Mr. Aldous Huxley and the late Katherine Mansfield illustrate three trends of modernity : we have lost, in Katherine Mansfield, a great writer. In the grand old tradition, I would name Mr. Hugh Walpole and (at her best) Mrs. Mordaunt. " Society " is " exposed " by Mr. McKenna.

A general survey must omit many sections, many worthy names : but the main distinction between objective creation and subjective analysis remains. The rest consists, for the most part, of variations on that theme.

II

PSYCHOLOGICAL

(1) Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Joyce

THE two living writers who exercise the most sinister influence on the contemporary novel are writers who appear, with every book that either of them produces, less and less like novelists. They are Mr. James Joyce and Mr. D. H. Lawrence. It is true that the Reading Public, that large and affable creature, does not know as much of Mr. Lawrence as Mr. Lawrence's admirers would wish, and knows practically nothing of Mr. James Joyce. But an influence may be all the wider for not being obvious. If novel-readers don't read Mr. Joyce, novel-writers do. Mr. Lawrence's power is the same in kind, though by no means so vast in scope, as was Henry James's in the last generation.

That both Mr. Joyce and Mr. Lawrence have natural genius is undeniable. If they

had not, they would not matter. But both have become the victims of empty theory. I was one of the first in this country—I rather think I was quite the first—to hail in print the genius of Mr. Joyce, when, many years ago, he put forward a quiet little volume of short stories called "Dubliners." I saw in his bleak and bitter realism a reading of life. I saw also a preoccupation with life's less important things; but that I then hoped he might conquer. Instead, it has conquered him; and the result is "Ulysses," a book almost exactly like the London Telephone Directory in size and weight, and only slightly less monotonous in style. To understand how completely Mr. Joyce has ceased to be a realist, we must understand what realism means. It means selection. Almost always it is used to mean the opposite. It is used to cover the implication that you can put everything into a work of art. You can't. Mr. Joyce goes from length to length, and is as far off as ever from getting everything in. "Ulysses," I am told, is supposed to represent the acts, thoughts, and emotions of a single man in a single day—though there are episodes which appear to make the scope of it wider than that. But, if it were as huge as twenty-four telephone direc-

tories, it could not register the acts, thoughts, and emotions which make up, for every single one of us, any single hour of the twenty-four. The telephone directory is, because of its rigorous selection and repression, a work of art compared to the waste-paper basket. And "Ulysses" is a waste-paper basket. Here is a specimen of its contents:

> On the boil sure enough: a plume of steam from the spout. He scalded and rinsed out the teapot and put in four full spoons of tea, tilting the kettle then to let water flow in. Having set it to draw, he took off the kettle and crushed the pan flat on the live coals and watched the lump of butter slide and melt.

That is an example only of the flat-footed domestic. It is dull, but it is not silly. Here are higher flights:

> Bald deaf Pat brought quite flat pad ink. Pat set with ink pen quite flat pad. Pat took plate dish knife fork. Pat went.

And:

> What suggested scene was then constructed by Stephen?
>
> Solitary hotel in mountain pass. Autumn. Twilight. Fire lit. In dark corner young man seated. Young woman enters. Restless. Solitary. She sits. She goes to window. She stands. She

sits. Twilight. She thinks. On solitary hotel paper she writes. She thinks. She writes. She sighs. Wheels and hoofs. She hurries out. He comes from his dark corner. He seizes solitary paper. He holds it towards fire. Twilight. He reads. Solitary.

And again :

> Why was the host (victim predestined) sad ?
> He wished that a tale of a deed should be told of a deed not by him should by him not be told.

And—may I suggest ?—

> Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise.

But no !—that last quotation is from " Alice in Wonderland," a better book.

Anybody who pretends to understand " Ulysses " throughout is deceiving others or himself. But the general idea of it is understandable : it is, in brief, the denial of the human soul. It is the idea that the truth about a man is the little separate bits of him, the tiny physical acts, the thwarted semi-conscious desires, the broken memories. In fact, none of these things would have any significance, or even any existence, but for the central, single, immortal soul.

The preoccupation with one aspect of life which is observable throughout "Ulysses" is terribly dreary, for this reason, that it involves a pointless harping upon inessentials. By all means let us have frankness, but frankness involves taking-for-granted, which is the precise opposite of harping-upon. Mr. Joyce's moral mistake is one with his æsthetic. By trying to put everything in, he succeeds only in leaving everything out. He never lets sex alone; yet it would be impossible to gather from his reiterations the one supremely important thing about sex—that it is the core of romantic love, the driving impulse which continually colours and recreates the world.

Incidentally, a complete refutation is here supplied of the psychological doctrine, so popular in what are called "circles," that all human ills of will and temper, and especially all obsessions, come from the inhibition of sexual impulses, so that what we need for salvation is a general release and decontrol. For in this book we get the picture of a very delirium of release. And the result is a world which, instead of being set free from the tyranny of obsession, is occupied with practically nothing else.

Mr. Lawrence is more restrained, but only a

little more coherent. He began well. The people who became excited over "Sons and Lovers" were undoubtedly right: the first half of that remarkable work struck one as the work of a man who was going to develop into a master. But Mr. Lawrence has scarcely fulfilled that early promise. Some of his short stories are little worlds of pity and terror; but, as a novelist, though he has certainly become more popular, he has also become much more puzzling. The impatient have begun to belittle him. But that is a pity. He has—he *still* has—extraordinary power. He still has a gift for the evocation of scenery and mood. He still can wield, on occasion, a fine and fiery style. But he no longer relates scenes or moods to concrete, various, incalculable human beings.

Mr. Lawrence is always writing about marriage. He seems to take the "duel of sex" literally. He pictures husband and wife as engaged in an agonisingly obstinate struggle, each demanding the subjugation of the other's personality, each refusing to yield. One can only appeal again to the universal fact. Marriage is not like that. Some marriages, doubtless, are; but the generalisation kills the truth. In "The Rainbow," a comparatively early work, we find this as the married state:

When he sat on his perch glancing sharply round with solitary pride, pride eminent and fierce, she dashed at him and threw him from his station savagely, she goaded him from his keen dignity of a male, she harassed him from his unperturbed pride, till he was mad with rage, his light brown eyes burned with fury, they saw her now, like flames of anger they flared at her and recognised her as the enemy.

And in "Aaron's Rod" some years later, this :

First and single he felt, and as such he bore himself. It had taken him years to realise that Lottie also felt herself first and single. . . .

. . . through his plaintive and homage-rendering love of a young husband was always, for the woman, discernible the arrogance of self-unyielding male. He never yielded himself : never. All his mad loving was only an effort. Afterwards, he was as devilishly unyielded as ever. . . .

. . . She could never understand whence arose in her, almost from the first days of marriage with him, her terrible paroxysms of hatred for him. She was in love with him : ah heaven, how maddeningly she was in love with him : a certain unseizable beauty that was his, and which fascinated her as a snake a bird. But in revulsion, how she hated him ! How she abhorred him ! How she despised and shuddered at him ! He seemed a horrible thing to her.

. . . She made his life a hell for him . . .

And in "Kangaroo," Mr. Lawrence's latest novel, this:

> They had another ferocious battle, Somers and Harriet; they stood opposite to one another in such fury one against the other that they nearly annihilated one another.

That Mr. Lawrence is not himself at ease about it all is obvious from the apology in "Kangaroo":

> Chapter follows chapter, and nothing doing. But man is a thought adventurer, and his falls into the Charybdis of ointment, and his shipwrecks on the rocks of ages, and his kisses across chasms, and his silhouette on a minaret: surely these are as thrilling as most things.
>
> . . . We can't be at a stretch of tension *all* the time, like the E string on a fiddle. If you don't like the novel, don't read it. If the pudding doesn't please you, leave it, leave it. *I* don't mind your saucy plate. I know too well that you can bring an ass to water, etc.

All very fine and large; but gesticulation takes us nowhere. Loosen the ties of art and scrap its limitations!—it is what our young poets are always inviting us to do. Rhyme, they say, is a fetter; strike it off! But it is not a fetter: it is a form. You cannot merely strike it off; you must replace it. Anybody can be negative, anybody can be reactionary. If art progresses,

it must be in the direction of greater coherence ; the control of the conscious mind increases ; rebel chaos yields to the form conceived of God. But this modern movement is backwards towards fear and night. Its very battle-cry is the return to incapacity, the counsel of despair. The heroic fight is abandoned. Mr. Lawrence himself has said it :

> Harriet and he ? It was time they both agreed that nothing has any meaning. Meaning is a dead letter when a man has no soul. And speech is like a volley of dead leaves and dust, stifling the air. Human beings should learn to make weird, wordless cries, like the animals. . . .

Or, indeed, (if we are to judge by certain pages of " Ulysses ") like Mr. James Joyce.

(II) The Influence at Work

We have not, however, finished with the psychologists when we have examined Mr. Joyce and Mr. Lawrence. These two are the most startling of them, and probably the most important. But we have now to trace the way in which other writers—whose natural talents and inclinations might have fitted them to inherit and hand on the great tradition of the English novel—are misled by insidious theory. Here we shall be dwelling no longer

with the awful gods of schools and cliques. We shall be dealing with familiar names. Already I feel a pang of conscious ingratitude. I owe these authors so many comfortable hours, and I am to accuse them of attempting an innovation which returns upon itself and fails! But, as Plato said, a man is not to be esteemed above the truth.

Partly through the general unrest of our day, partly through the direct influence of such pioneers as Freud and Jung, partly through their influence mediated by such writers as Mr. Lawrence, two heresies are at work in contemporary literature—so strongly at work that they have, as it were, bent the stream of development out of shape. One is that the aberration is more important than the norm, and one that the explanation is more important than the thing explained. We have seen the working out of these heresies in extreme cases. In discussing the work of Mr. J. D. Beresford, Miss Rebecca West, Miss May Sinclair, and Miss Colburn Mayne, we shall find them still at work, but less completely and therefore less destructively.

This is not the place to discuss Mr. Beresford, author of the noble Jacob Stahl trilogy; nor Mr. Beresford, author of that fine and subtle

fantasy, " The Hampdenshire Wonder." Here we are concerned only with a third, a wayward, a truant Mr. Beresford, of " God's Counterpoint," " The Imperfect Mother," and " Love's Pilgrim." In " God's Counterpoint," it is true, the creative genius triumphs over the theorist, the novelist over the psychologist ; for the story is of sexual oppressions, frustrations, and fulfilments which observation might have suggested no less urgently than do the text-books ; in the other two books it is the theorist who defeats the creator. For, in them, not only is the bad *kind* of approach allowed, but room is given to some of the fantastical notions which may, loosely perhaps but conveniently and not unjustly, be grouped under the general psychological theorem called the " Œdipus Complex."

Miss West has published only two novels—one much too short, one much too long. In " The Return of the Soldier " she applied a medical theory to an emotional situation ; and, because the theory *was* medical, the emotion to that extent was marred. But so scrupulous was the technique, so sane the sympathy, that judgment condoned the central weakness. " This," one felt, " is to be admired as a *tour de force* ; it shows that, when its creator escapes from

the particular case to the general reality, and becomes universal by becoming individual, she will do great things." We waited several years, and Miss West gave us "The Judge." A queer mixture! In the beginning, where Edinburgh is etched for us, fine and bleak and grey, an almost miraculous rightness urges us forward in the happy chase of perfection. And then, suddenly and abruptly, nothing is left but the absurd.

The Anthropologist, for whom it is but a step from Australian bull-roaring to Attic tragedy, will tell us what primitive fact of need or desire underlies that Œdipus myth which so obsesses the dealers in obsession. Let him, say I; and a blessing on all knowledge! In the range of human experience, with which it is the novelist's business to deal, a mother may be her boy's best friend, but she is not his best girl. Mr. Shaw's hero who says:

> Two things I hate—my duty and my mother,

goes too far in the opposite direction: the mean is struck by Miss Rose Macaulay, who, with admirably restrained wit, insists that, "contrary to a common belief, the great affection felt by Œdipus for his mother is most unusual," and by Artemus Ward, who tells us of a melodrama

in which each of the characters, as he died, stated that he saw his mother—until it came to the turn of the arch-villain, who died stating, in " a able and elerquent speech," that he didn't see his mother much. That arch-villain would seem an angel nowadays. Nowadays—in novels —it is a dark and dreadful thing to love your mother. It leads—in novels—to red ruin and the breaking-up of the marriage-laws. The hero of Miss Rebecca West's " The Judge," though we are repeatedly assured by his creator of his essential nobility, behaves like the dreariest sort of cad to the girl he is going to marry, and sticks his brother with the bread-knife, partly for love of the lady who gave him birth ; and she, in her turn, so as to make everything easy for her son, sends him out of his mind (if indeed he can be said to have been in it) by committing suicide—precisely like the gentleman quoted by Sam Weller, who cut off his little boy's head to cure him of squinting and then announced : " Now we look compact and comfortable." Lives which in life would have been cheerful and respectable are faked into the darkness and delirium of pseudo-tragedy (not *real* tragedy, which of its very essence must be inevitable). " Why the devil is she always doing such extraordinary things ? " the son

exclaims, thinking about the mother. It is a fair question—but not from him. She does such extraordinary things because she is a lunatic. But equally he is a lunatic. All the people in the book are lunatics. The world, however, is not populated entirely by lunatics. If there is indeed any truth in the explanation after which Miss West is groping, it is the truth of the consulting-room, not of the living-room. And the living-room is where we live.

Miss Colburn Mayne is a delicate and sensitive artist, insufficiently recognised. She has written some of the most charming of short stories; in the novel "One of Our Grandmothers" she creates a delicious world, where gentleness is romance: we shall return to that. But in "Nine of Hearts" she writes nonsense. A little girl finds herself occasionally out of sympathy with her mother. "Yes," her mother explains, in effect, "that is your suppressed wish that I should die and be out of the way of your relationship with your father." And that to a girl in her 'teens! It would be enough to send her mad; but, in this kind of fiction, as we have already noticed, everybody is mad anyway from the start.

Miss May Sinclair is learned, gifted; some of her work has soared far beyond the range of

our present argument. But the same influence has brought the same fault. If we go back only so far as " The Three Sisters," in which we find girls robbed of wholesome excitements and satisfactions by the loneliness, the manlessness, of their lives, we see powers of sympathy and terror achieving something permanent; but already the fallacy is working, the view is beginning to be tortured into obliqueness.

The very name, " The Three Sisters," is ominous; it suggests weirds and how to dree them. The witches in " Macbeth " were three sisters, and so were the Gorgons, and so were the Fates. But then so, on the other hand, were the Graces. In Mary, Gwendolen, and Alice Cartaret there is something at once of the Witch, the Gorgon, and the Grace; there is something at once terrible, bodeful, and beautiful in them; their setting of straggling northern village and wild northern moor is singularly appropriate to their unhappy story—unhappy with an unhappiness that paradoxically seems half wanton and half inevitable: very subtly and artistically are the discriminations among their characters set off against the over-brooding family likeness. I have called their story " unhappy," though two out of the three " heroines " find certain satisfactions and adequacies in life

to outweigh in the long run the sufferings and frustrations. Nothing can rid them of that encircling gloom of atmosphere which is finely indicated at the very beginning of the book:

> All these things of stone—the village, the Vicarage, the church, the churchyard, and the gravestones of the dead—are alike naked and black, blackened as if fire had passed over them. And in their greyness and their desolation they are one with each other, and with the network of low walls that links them to the last solitary farm on the High Moor. And on the breast of the earth they show, one moment, solid as if hewn out of her heart, and another, slender and wind-blown as a tangle of grey thread on her green gown.

In this setting conceive the sisters:

> All three were alike in the small, broad faces that brooded, half sullen and half sad; in the wide eyes that watched vaguely; in the little tender noses, and in the mouths, tender and sullen too; in the arch and sweep of the upper lips, the delicate fullness of the lower; in the way of the thick hair, parted and turned back over the brows in two wide and shallow waves.

You see the suggestion of sexuality; and, indeed, but for the free poise and speed, the touch of Artemis, in Gwendolen, and the chilly element in the calculations of Mary, the whole

story might be called a study in the sexual. I admit that these are big, very big and important exceptions ; I admit, too, that the hero, the local doctor, is not troubled by sex beyond quite reasonable and natural limits—and yet it is the fact that sex broods and glooms like a monstrous evil spirit over the whole. If I understand Miss Sinclair aright (and her treatment is all that there is of the most delicate and allusive), the vicar, the father of the three girls, is over-sexed to the verge of insanity ; he has killed one wife, and driven another to leave him ; his enforced celibacy " doth work like madness in the brain." This peculiarity is repeated in his youngest daughter, for whom the doctor quite frankly says that marriage and madness are the alternatives. Now, I am not protesting against this theme. It was understood by the ancients, and could scarcely have been called inadmissible by Aristotle. But in the treatment, I think, there is perhaps something to protest against, and, having paid my tribute to its artistic delicacy, I may be allowed my complaint. It seems to me that the whole thing is kept at an unnatural pitch and strain. I find Miss Sinclair's pages too oppressive ; even her humour gives small relief. She never allows one to breathe the common air ; her very language is breathless.

Then, in "Mary Olivier," recollections of childhood are robbed of their morning colour, and there are substituted those implications which only adult analysis provides. In "The Romantic" the method is in the highest degree illegitimate. It treats the problem of the coward—a dark problem, worthy of wise treatment. Sir Walter Scott gave it wise treatment in "The Fair Maid of Perth." But Miss Sinclair introduces, in her final pages, a medical man to explain that So-and-so was a coward because he had such-and-such organically the matter with him. That is not playing fair: we ought to have been told that in the *first* pages. What is the mystery of life, the perpetual provocation to religious and philosophical and artistic interpretation, the very stuff of speculation, save this—that certain laws and obligations remain universal, amid the bewildering and apparently cruel diversity of gifts and opportunity? "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day." Or, again, "Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one." It is difficult, but it is so. The soul must do what it can with the body, and the body varies; but you must not interpret the soul in terms of the

body, for then there is nothing of the soul left.

In " Ann Severn and the Fieldings," again, Miss Sinclair makes her hero depart from his beloved because she has become in his mind, through a pure accident, associated with something painful that he does not want to think about. Is this modern love? Modern, perhaps; but the Victorians knew more about love.

To sum up—all conduct is an intersection of two planes: general nature and particular character. One can say, of an action, either: " That is what anyone would do in the circumstances," or: " That is what So-and-so would do." The generalisation covers a wide field of ordinary behaviour, but it is never certain and it is never significant. The particular judgment covers the acts which, however trivial in appearance or effect, are indicative of the living individual. In art, when we estimate the verisimilitude of the conduct presented, we necessarily judge both in general and in particular. We say: " Anyone might behave like this," or contrariwise: " No one could possibly behave like this." But equally we say: " The character conceived by the artist would "—or, contrariwise, " would not "—" behave like this." And it is where

the two planes cut—where our sense of general psychological truth is met simultaneously with our appreciation of special characteristics—that our judgment of the work of art is formed. The great artists, like the great philosophers, present the general in the particular. They make us realise the fact that only So-and-so would do *this* as an illustration of the larger fact that human nature is *that*. In their hands the least detail of conduct has significance—it shows the soul : and just because the terrible uniqueness, the loneliness, of the soul is thus revealed, we see the world-soul within. In this way the oddest conduct may appear as the most natural, the most revealing. But the new method errs on the one side by being too particular, on the other side by being too general. Minute psychological reactions are elaborated with such persistent reference to the one occasion dealt with tha they cease to have any value as revelations of character : character, instead of being explained, is literally *explained away*. One gets the impression that the oddity, instead of showing So-and-so to be concretely and individually So-and-so, merely shows So-and-so to be as odd as everybody else, and odd in the same way as everybody else. All action becomes incalculable, irrelevant, insignificant. There is

no sharpness, no differentiation, no interplay, no coherence. Individuality is dissolved " by the discandying of this pelleted storm." Psychology is lost in words. Or, alternatively, the general scientific law is imposed upon us in place of artistic creation. Now, no scientific explanation can be *true* in the full sense in which the artist's rendering of emotion is true. Science, being abstract, is only a continual approximation. " The new psychology " may be an advance, a discovery ; it is none the less irrelevant in literature. The measure of artistic success can be taken only by realising that it is equally real for people who hold quite opposite opinions—psychological, philosophical, scientific, political, even religious. Nobody now accepts the cosmology of Homer or Virgil or even Milton ; does that detract from the essential truth of the " Iliad," the " Æneid," or " Paradise Lost " ? And from that truth the new movement has gone miserably astray.

It will not do to dismiss it with the sneer that all this psychological business is a mere casual and irrelevant incident ; on the contrary, its influence is deleterious and considerable. It has given us, in the hands of gifted and fascinating writers, wrong methods and wrong results. And it is going on. Not that I fear *permanent*

harm from it. Already its main force seems to be spent. It was an experiment, and is already recognised as unsuccessful. Back to the main stream!

III

BIOGRAPHICAL

MR. COMPTON MACKENZIE did not invent the English realistic-autobiographic novel. That goes back to Defoe; but Mr. Mackenzie has given it a local habitation and an Oxford accent. He did not invent the picaresque-picturesque, which was flourishing under Elizabeth. But he has adapted it to modern conditions — not very successfully. And he has wedded the two types by the rites of Bohemia.

The vogue of "Sinister Street" is certainly due in great degree to its literary merit. It is excellently written. But it also had luck. Rarely has a book fitted so precisely into the niche prepared for it by circumstance. The universities of Oxford and Cambridge came, in the years immediately preceding the war, into a double prominence of comfort and despair. On the one hand, Grub Street had

flowed into Fleet Street, and scholarship had abandoned the garret for the club ; literary journalism was in fine fettle ; there were movements in it, as there were in poetry, in music, in all the fine arts ; and a large number of the moving spirits appeared to come from the older universities. On the other hand, the dons were—it was implied by the haughty young—played out. The home of lost causes had become the antechamber to the cafés of Soho. And Mr. Compton Mackenzie was the Groom of the Antechamber. His scorn of a grand tradition was prodigious, symptomatic, and topical. So was his sympathy with undergraduates. Undergraduates at that time seemed to be more articulate and more influential than they are likely to seem again. They all read " Sinister Street " ; and ever since they have all been writing it.

Most of them, unhappily, lack Mr. Mackenzie's chief weapon. He is master of a particularly fascinating style, at once smooth and various, which gives the quality of poetry to his explication of ordinary things. He has, moreover, some creative power. But there is no doubt that one part of " Sinister Street," and the part that has been most assiduously imitated, is not creative at all. How much of

the plot is taken from real life it would be impertinent to inquire ; but the photographic reproduction of the setting is as easy to discern as it must have been to do. And it is this point of weakness that most of the imitators have fastened upon and exploited. There is a formula : public school, University, " night life." What is forgotten is that neither public school nor University nor night life has, for fiction, any significance in itself. The interesting thing is the individual. When Sir Philip Sidney's muse instructed him to look in his heart and write, the advice was excellent, because it was addressed to Sir Philip Sidney, and he had Stella in his heart. But the notion that everybody has at least one good book in him is misleading. To draw out from one's own interior the material for a book, and to objectify it *as* a book, requires more literary skill than is given to most of us, and more courage than is discoverable in the whole history of indiscretion. Even the most ruthless artists transmute and idealise ; that is, indeed, the function of their art ; if they were more ruthless they would the less be artists. But to transmute is not to ignore or to shirk ; and it must be confessed that, since the publication of the second volume of " Sinister Street " in

1914, a great number of young men have repeated the formula while shirking or ignoring the spirit. They have imagined themselves to be giving us the secrets of their souls when they were really giving us, under thin disguises, the names of their schools and colleges. If any one of them had been brought up by a wolf, like Romulus or Mowgli, it would at least have made a change in the externals. But one school is desperately like another. I must not say that Oxford is like Cambridge: but books about the one resemble books about the other. And the delineation of living people becomes daily more daring and less tolerable.

Mr. Compton Mackenzie, having meanwhile dashed about the world in narratives like "Sylvia and Michael," which do not call for detailed criticism, has reverted to the biographical form in "The Altar Steps," "The Parson's Progress" and "The Heavenly Ladder"—a trilogy of which the second volume is somewhat dull and the third, though exciting enough, somewhat incoherent. Indeed, Mr. Compton Mackenzie, in the last resort, must base his claim to fame upon "Guy and Pauline," in which practically nothing happens but every least thing matters. That book is like a dream,

a dream how melancholy but how exquisite! Pauline's shining and youthful simplicity, Guy's restless and ineffective egoism, alike degenerate into hysteria under the strain of their relationship. But their love, while it still has beauty, has so much, and is so deliciously accompanied by the music of woodland and water!

To enumerate the lesser devotees of the Mackenzie manner would be irrelevant. Some of them have produced good books, some bad, most mediocre; and those of them who had the right stuff in them, the true imaginative instinct, have gone on to do larger and finer work in quite different fields: Mr. Ivor Brown, for instance, and Mr. John Palmer. But there is one offshoot of the "Sinister Street" method which is worth mention even in a broad survey of tendencies, because to the public school and university interest it has added the political. The political, however, involves the sociological; and here we are encroaching on a class which we must soon consider separately—the class which seeks through the medium of fiction to tell the history of our own time, and in particular the years of war.

To balance boyhood's conventional Odysseys, we have, of course, girlhood's. But no woman writer has done for the early life of

women, up to and including adult years, quite what Mr. Compton Mackenzie has done for that of men. Miss Netta Syrett's attempt in this manner is perhaps the best. In actual *school* stories, however, women have, on the whole, been more successful than men. Mr. Alec Waugh did indeed set a new fashion in this kind—a fashion of outspokenness; and his "Loom of Youth," a good book in itself, was nothing short of marvellous as the work of a boy in his teens; but Miss E. M. Delafield and Miss Clemence Dane, who have specialised somewhat in the study of self-deception and unconscious hypocrisy, both began their successful careers as novelists with powerful studies of the school-life of girls, certainly not inferior to any rival work that men have been doing, and the best of all contemporary school stories is, I think, "The Getting of Wisdom" by "Henry Handel Richardson"—a woman.

Variations on the main formula of the biographical novel are necessarily innumerable, and shade off in every direction till they mingle with other types and clamour for other labels. School and college are a formula to themselves; leaving them, we are lost in multiplicity. And yet we have here to consider certain interesting variations. Mr. Louis Golding, in "Forward

from Babylon," told a story of Jewish childhood and adolescence which was " different " both in its facts and in its feeling ; Mr. Brett Young gave the originality of his finely poetic mind to " The Young Physician " ; and, most amazingly of all, Mr. Geoffrey Dennis, in " Mary Lee," produced an intimate study of old-fashioned girlhood which bore every appearance of being actual reminiscence.

Indeed, one would have expected Mr. Dennis's name to be George rather than Geoffrey. Every famous woman writer is addressed by a " George—*seu Jane libentius audis*." If Mr. Dennis goes on as he has begun, he may become famous ; and, if I did not know to the contrary, I should conclude that he was a woman writer. " Mary Lee " is a remarkable book : it is doubly remarkable as having been written by a man. For it reads like a specially intimate and courageous attempt at autobiography—at any rate, till near the end. In the second part it goes to pieces, it becomes sentimental, melodramatic and obscure. Mary discovers her father, who has—need I say ?—wronged her mother in the long ago. " Suddenly, savagely—I cut him across the face with my whip." He was—again, need I say ?—an aristocrat. But all the first part, which

is much the longer of the two, deals with Mary's childhood, and rings true.

She was born in 1848. She was the offspring of that ill-omened match with the aristocrat. She was brought up by her grandmother and her great-aunt Jael as one of the religious community to which they belonged. "They called themselves the Saints, or more modestly the Brethren. Outsiders called them the Plymouth Brethren." All the details of this bringing-up are clear and convincing, hard with the outline of concrete tangible things, arranged in light and shadow and perspective as though by that instinctive artist, the human memory. Extraordinary exclusions and denials left to the child an inner life rich in experience, confusion and speculation. And the externals of the life are hit off as memorably as the emotions.

The child's own mind; her fears, her superstitions; her consciousness of two selves within her; her faith in a mystic number—if only she could count thirty-seven so as to coincide with the passage of time occupied by some outward incident, there would be luck! —her deliberate wickedness in worshipping a graven image in order to "get even" with Aunt Jael and with God: all of it is too good

to be untrue. Her diary, too, in which "religion looms large, with food a bad second"! There was the terror of its being discovered:

> The precautions I took, beyond subtle hiding, were: prayer, magic, and the etching in red ink on each exercise-book-cover of this Device:
>
> PRIVATE.
>
> SHAME!
>
> ON WHOEVER MAY THINK EVEN OF READING THIS BOOK.
>
> SHAME!

The most touching resolutions are recorded; the gist of one of them runs:

> March 9th, 1861.—*My Mother died thirteen years ago to-day.*—Therefore from now onwards I DO RESOLVE:
>
> I. EVERY DAY
>
> To drink a glass of cold water before breakfast and at night (better than senna). To go for a walk. To brush my hair well. To clean my teeth hard. To learn at least seven new verses of the Word by heart and revise seventeen old ones. To tell the Lord everything in prayer.
>
> II. NEVER
>
> To steal oatmeal from the larder. To think dirty things.

III. ALWAYS

To eat slowly (37 bites to each mouthful).
To be like God would like.

RESOLVED, with Mother's help.

MARY LEE.

20 minutes past 6.
March 9th, 1861.

It will be agreed that Mr. Dennis could not have invented that unless he had an astonishing imagination. And scarcely less wonderful is the epistolary style of Uncle Simeon, who, even in the inferior part, can end a letter thus:

Dear Martha and Albert send their love, in which one is glad, with prayerful sincerity, to join. One has been dwelling much lately on Philippians iv, 8.
Accept one's best Wishes,

SIMEON GREEBER.

Mr. Greeber unfortunately has a lust of cruelty. Indeed, this particular defect, in Mary Lee's world, must considerably have exceeded the proportion (in Oscar Wilde's phrase) "laid down by statistics for our guidance."

I regard "Mary Lee" as in a high degree typical and significant. But the writer of our generation who has carried the biographical method at once to its logical extreme and its æsthetic height is, beyond doubt, Mr. J. D.

Beresford. In the Jacob Stahl trilogy he has traced a full life, not adventurous in the obvious sense, not startling, but rich with varieties of intellectual and emotional experience ; he has never come near a formula ; he has blended creation with recollection ; and in consequence has produced what will live, not as a picture of the times (which it never pretended to be), but as an almost unique revelation of one adventuring soul.

Hamlet, we all know, was not merely the Prince of Denmark, but you and I and our neighbour and our enemy and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—" not one, but all mankind's epitome." How far this is true of every really imaginative creation is an interesting consideration. Certainly Hamlet is the supreme instance ; certainly other instances can be found in deeply-felt and carefully-conceived literature through the centuries ; and certainly among such instances Mr. Beresford's creation of Jacob Stahl is conspicuous. The gentle reader (if he is really gentle) will often find his own face portrayed in the mirror here held up to nature. I am inclined, as regards the undoubted suggestion of an autobiographical note, to think that in spiritual analysis Mr. Beresford is objective rather than subjective ;

for, if he were not, he would scarcely have made the material parallels so very precise. Jacob Stahl—he too—writes a trilogy, of which the first volume deals with the hero's boyhood. The "Morning Post" (in the novel) says of Jacob Stahl's first effort: "Mr. Stahl has written a very remarkable book. If, as it seems, it is his first, 'John Tristram' should place its writer at once in the forefront of modern novelists"; and concludes by congratulating him on "one of the most convincing studies of character we have read for a very long time." The "Morning Post" (in real life) said of "The Early History of Jacob Stahl": "Mr. J. D. Beresford has written a very remarkable book. If, as it seems——"; but I need not transcribe the whole quotation. Coincidence is admitted to have a long arm; here it would seem to be laughing up its sleeve. The method is, artistically, to be judged by its success (what other criterion of success is there?)—and it succeeds. All the little touches are exact. Realism is idealised into reality. Not that the most accurate observation would by itself suffice for that—Mr. Beresford not only sees details, he sees them in their due priority and place; he makes them "compose." And this, I think, is the secret of his delightful

descriptions. With most novelists dialogue or action alternates with descriptive passages; one is subconscious of labels—"Inset: purple patch." But Mr. Beresford brings to natural description the same touch as to delineation of mood; he sees the picture, feels the atmosphere, judges the value, and renders it all with that truth which is beauty. In one respect at least he resembles his own Jacob; he is a candidate for truth. In a grave and almost passionate declaration of belief, culminating in the aphorism: "Virtue lies only in the continual renewal of effort; the boast of success is an admission of failure"—he tells us of his hero: "He is ever at the beginning of life, reaching out towards those eternal values that are ever beyond his grasp." Beyond his, because beyond everybody's. It would indeed be difficult for anyone to read this book without feeling honester for it—nearer, and more anxious to be near, that truth for which we are all in our own ways candidates.

Mr. John Cournos also has written three consecutive biographical volumes, and the first two of them shine with an intellectual honesty almost equal to Mr. Beresford's, but in the third, "Babel," when his alien hero comes to London, the individual interest is lost in a haze

of over-ambitious generalities. We are supposed to envisage the stir and hurry of contemporary life. It is hard to see how any book, however big, by any genius, however great, could represent the muddled grandeur of London, save by the sideways light of illumination falling on one point or another. The picture is too bewildering for any canvas. It is the artist's job to show us the order in chaos; it will not do for him merely to indicate a confused thunder and call it "Babel." It is, however, Mr. Cournos's title and abstract conception that are at fault rather than his central story; I rank him with the biographers, rather than with the sociologists, because his sociology is negligible and his revelation of his hero's emotions admirable.

IV

SOCIOLOGICAL

(1) War

MR. STEPHEN McKENNA's "Sonia" is the outstanding example of a type, a species within the genus of the contemporary biographic. The species is sociological; it seeks to catch the time-spirit on the wing. Particularly does it identify the spiritual pilgrimage of its hero and heroine with national agonies or triumphs; it takes the war-years for its climax and climacteric.

A great deal has been pondered and written about the special difficulties created for the novelist by the gulf, the dividing gulf, of the war. The mere technical difficulties have been exaggerated; for, after all, they differ only in degree, not in kind, from those entailed by all change of external circumstances. No art is adequate which does not gauge how far the heart changes with the sky; if it stands help-

less before any human experience, however tremendous, it fails as art. Life is single, and limitation is the same thing as opportunity. The one use illegitimate is the one use unilluminating. Many novelists adopted the war as a mere way out; they tied knots which they would never have dared to tie if that monstrous sword had not been handy for the cutting; and the cheapness of the device is hard to forgive. That which called forth the greatest emotion of which human nature is capable must not be so lightly handled. The god in the car must not be degraded to the god out of the machine.

Among novels dealing actually with the war, I know of few that come even near success. The shock was too great, the shadow too heavy, the horror too vast, for contemporary artists. Their consciousness would not accept it, still less arrange it. The late Wilfrid Ewart's "Way of Revelation," though it displayed extraordinary qualities, was not adequate; it forced the note in the attempt to achieve the impossible, to create in description the same effect as had been created in experience. I have read no English war-novel that I should rate with, or near, "Le Feu," by Henri Barbusse; but Mr. A. P. Herbert's "The Secret

Battle " is a great book. It does not attempt to " cover the ground," but concentrates with a painful intensity upon one aspect—the strain which the war imposed on the nerves of a peculiarly sensitive, and at the same time heroic, soldier.

Mr. Walpole, again, has written in " The Dark Forest," a very wonderful book—a book at once terrible and beautiful. It is so drenched in the pity and terror (or, if you like to put it so, the nervous reactions) of war that it even reminds one to a certain extent of that most marvellous of all passages in the literature of the subject, Tolstoi's description of the battle of Borodino in " War and Peace." I do not mean, of course, that it has the same effect of size, the same effect of typifying life by transcending it. That quality belongs only to the few overpowering geniuses of the world. But perhaps we do not sufficiently realise how little good war-literature has been bequeathed to us even by the giants of the past. The tendency of writers, even the greatest, has been to romanticise this matter—to make it an affair of flags and trumpets. Mr. Walpole has not succumbed to that temptation—has apparently not even felt it. Like Mr. Herbert, he has tackled the most tremendous event in history in the only

way in which it can be tackled without effrontery: it is to him not the theme for a book, but an experience penetrating terribly into the individual soul. In the light of it he judges good and bad, strength and weakness: and finds—without one trace of sentimentality; with, indeed, an ugly ruthlessness of realism—the race not always to the swift and the battle not always to the strong.

The time of the story is early in the war: the scene, the Russian front; the setting, the Russian retreat, compelled by lack of ammunition. The central idea is mystical, poetical: it is concerned with the triumph of the soul over fear and death. The characters are grouped together in a Red-Cross unit: Andrey Vassilievitch, fussy and self-conscious; Nikitin and Semyonov, two contrasted types of power and efficiency; Marie Ivanovna, the young, the beautiful, the hard, the tender, the inquisitively adventurous; and, lastly, the two Englishmen, Durward who tells the story, and Trenchard who is in a way the "hero" of it. Trenchard is one of those awkward self-depreciatory men who are always doing things wrong and minding about it: he captures the young ardour of Marie Ivanovna, but only momentarily, spuriously, because he is "different" and

" romantic "—as soon as she comes under the spell of Semyonov, his brutal, sensual self-sufficiency tells too strongly against the contrast of Trenchard's hesitations. She is killed : and to each of the rivals comes the conviction that the one of them who meets death first will have her in the next world. Between Nikitin and Andrey Vassilievitch there is a roughly parallel relationship ; they also have both loved one woman. Put thus crudely, the idea sounds crude. It is, however, so sincere ; it is so hauntingly and movingly treated ; the background of vivid sky and dark forest, of petty vexation and personal dubiety, of all the filthy mess and horror of war, is so complete, that the whole has unity and truth. The writing is beautiful. To my mind the most memorable thing is the contrast between Nikitin and Semyonov, the one so gentle, the other so much the opposite, yet both so amazingly competent, adequate, overpowering. Plenty of writers *tell* us that their characters are like that—but to make us *feel* it !

(II) War-Time

Among the books which sought to record the mood and movement of the war-years in England, as distinct from incidents of the war

itself, I must (though Mr. Wells properly falls outside my scope) put "Mr. Britling" very high—but not as a novel. In a novel, the special interest must be fused with the general: in "Mr. Britling" the general overshadows, where it does not discard, the special. The picture is memorable, not the story. And, indeed, this is not the one of Mr. Wells's books that our young political novelists have chiefly followed; that honour belongs more to "The New Machiavelli." A book's influence has no direct relation to its merits. "The New Machiavelli" cannot hold a candle to "The Wheels of Chance," but it has caused more blackening of paper and searching of heart. It presents a particular embarrassment, and provides a particular solution, which are to be met everywhere now. If you are writing a novel (as ten to one you are), and if your hero is busy with Parliament between 1906, say, and 1914, or between 1918 and 1922, you are working in two antagonistic conventions, fiction and fact; nor—it must be repeated—can those be commended who introduce living and famous people, in their habits as we know them, with but such little change of name and circumstance as serves no purpose of concealment, and with the inevitable distortion which comes from the

author's personal feeling for—or against—his model. It will scarcely be denied, by Mr. Wells's most prostrate admirers (and, this side of prostration, I reverence his genius and his generosity as much as any man), that he has set a bad example in this matter. Of course, he had precedents. You can find them in Dickens, Thackeray, Meredith. But surely the device should be used as these masters used it —sparingly. Carried beyond a certain point, it is open to an æsthetic objection as well as a moral. The creations of art should be kept within one accepted convention. Not *how much* you ask your audience to grant, but *how*, is the essential. The convention must be coherent in itself—that is the only unity worth bothering about. If you want to sustain the illusion, you must not introduce a real person, known to your readers in the flesh or in " The Times " ; he is out of the picture. Such realism destroys reality. It is as if a modern dramatist were to insist upon putting the fourth wall of the room on the stage. (And so, before long, a modern dramatist will : and, to the sort of play in which it will be done, it won't matter.)

" Sonia " is a mixture of public school, politics, and the social activities imputed to what used to be called the governing classes.

The political part reminds one of Mr. Wells. That, however, is neither here nor there; the resemblance may be due to the time-spirit, rather than to even unconscious imitation; and anyway there is no theft in literature, unless the goods are spoiled in the stealing. "The New Machiavelli" is as fair game as the old Adam. And Mr. McKenna's political survey was sufficiently brilliant to divert attention from the extreme weakness of his plot. O'Rane, the lauded, exalted hero, displays a sentimental imbecility to make one's blood flow backward in one's veins. When he has reduced a woman to starvation, he says: "I'm not disobeyed—much." Need I add that he says it "very quietly"? There ought to be a league of young authors sworn never to make any of their characters say anything "very quietly."

Already in "Sonia" is apparent the particular object of interest which has provoked Mr. McKenna's most vivid work as a satirist of society—"Modern Woman," that bold bad brand which does so much harm among the rich. The young woman of to-day—restless, selfish, *blasée*, "fast"; stimulating her already jaded nerves to a ceaseless round of hectic gaiety and heartless flirtation; rouged, powdered and adored—jazzes her way over a floor

parqueted with broken hearts, and turns Mr. McKenna and his like into best-sellers. To think that life is thus and thus, and we never knew it!

The earliest of the younger writers to apply Mr. Wells's neo-Machiavellianism successfully to the war-period, was, as far as I know, Mrs. Mary Agnes Hamilton, whose sensitive and beautiful "Dead Yesterday" anticipated by some months Mr. Britling himself. Nigel Strode, the hero of her book, is one of those men who are always and by everybody called "charming," but who have no spiritual reserves; their charm is only skin-deep. He is acting-editor of a weekly review called the "New World," but none the less is, as most people were before the war, culpably ignorant of foreign politics. He is also bored by them, and by almost everything else. "It is his nature to." His friendships are superficial, his emotions selfish; he drifts into and out of intellectual flirtations which are not quite "engagements." His love for Daphne provides a real thrill, but it passes. The declaration of war provides another, but he is soon bored with the war. Daphne, too much in love to be critical, yet cannot help feeling the spiritual falseness and flippancy of Nigel's attitude; and

the way in which her personal problem is interwoven with the social disastrousness of war is subtle and true.

But, in the sociological novel as in the psychological, danger comes with generalisation :

> Too tired to think, too jaded to feel, too unhappy to believe, men and women sought in excitement the only relief they knew from the ennui that grew as they struggled, frantically, to escape from it. They had got beyond, in the cant modern phrase, everything else. From ennui they swung to violence, and from violence back to ennui ; and violence culminated in death. To spirits weary of life death was the one adventure left.

Is that a true summary ? It is not. Nor could any summary be true of an event so vast and various.

" Sonia," was later ; and a little later still, if my memory serves, was " Changing Winds," in which Mr. St. John Ervine, with characteristic courage, made his hero appear at first to be a coward. That book is a standing exposure of the fallacy that you cannot have too much of a good thing. Mr. Ervine, being an Irishman, tried to make the best of both islands ; the Irish part of the story was, perhaps naturally, the better.

Miss Sinclair's " The Tree of Heaven " has its place here—not the best of the novels of

war-time, but the most clearly symptomatic of war-time's effect upon the novel. Let us examine the variety of its implications.

Philistia is my only joy. Or rather, strictly speaking, it would be so if Bohemia were the only alternative. To more aspiring spirits, Bohemia is preferable; but then it is so baffling. We have poetical warrant for assuming its latitude (which, both in manners and in morals, is considerable) to be uncertain; and its geographical constitution eluded the mental grasp of Shakespeare. However, there is a third choice: Philistia and Bohemia do not exhaust the world between them. There are three regions of the spirit—Philistia, Bohemia and Hampstead. So many of one's friends live, or say they live, in Hampstead, that it has got the undeserved reputation of being a place. Really, of course, it is an idea, and a very good idea. It is a state of mind, an attitude towards life. It has the good points without the bad of the rival localities: it is a Bohemia purged of indiscretion, and a Philistia with the chill off. Miss Sinclair, whose extreme and almost excessive cleverness is equally able to grapple with all three regions, has put them all into "The Tree of Heaven": but she has put Hampstead in the middle. A tree of heaven

is bound to have its roots in earth, and it would naturally choose the Hampstead soil.

Miss Sinclair's tree grows in the garden of the Harrisons' house, a house which, as she puts it with characteristic wit, has " the air of all the old houses of Hampstead, the wonderful air of not acknowledging the existence of Bank Holidays." Anthony Harrison is a successful business man—successful not merely by grace, but by nature. His wife is devoted to him, but still more devoted to her three sons: Michael the poet, Nicholas the engineer, and John. The daughter Dorothy is somewhat out of it. She knows, and knows that her mother knows, that her mother does not love her as much as the three sons. And beyond the family looms The Family. There is Anthony's brother Bartholomew, a morose hypochondriac with an unfaithful wife, and Anthony's wife's brother Maurice, who drinks; and especially there are Anthony's wife's mother, " Grannie," and Grannie's three unmarried daughters—Auntie Louie, Auntie Emmy, and Auntie Edie. These three aunties are—as is proved by the very fact of their usually being thought and spoken of as aunties—only subsidiary adjuncts of the main story: they are, however, the most effective and memorable part of the book.

They are all starved, warped, defeated. Miss Sinclair's method of dealing with them is entirely objective and pitiless. Every detail of their physical unattractiveness, every variation of their jealousies and disappointments, is emphasized with that uncanny insight and thoroughness of which she is past master. It is a hard picture : it is not correlated with the larger solaces and redemptions of the spiritual life. But, for what it is, it is wholly successful. It reminds us that peace hath her miseries no less profound than war. Indeed the mere size of war's miseries gives them a quality which differentiates them from those mean and sordid despairs—despairs that are so infinite because they are so infinitesimal. I am inclined to think that the book loses somewhat in artistic proportion through the extraordinary power and finish of the subsidiary part devoted to the " aunties." Attention is distracted from the far larger but slightly less successful story of the Harrison children themselves. The story is *their* story, even though it is primarily their mother's, for their mother lives in them : and it is their story because it is designed to show the effect of war upon them. The fact that Miss Sinclair succeeds with the " aunties," who are within her compass, and fails with the

war, which necessarily is not, is a summary criticism of all this type of literature.

There are three parts of this book : " Peace," " Vortex," and " Victory." In the first, we are presented with the detachment, the serenity, the complacent self-centredness of well-to-do family life at the end of last century. In the second, as the children grow up, we get the stir and whirl of the years preceding the war : militant suffragism, the futurist-cubist-vorticist movement in art, and so forth. In the third, of course, we come to the war. The war completes the cycle—the contradiction—the Nemesis. The placid home, which regarded politics, and particularly foreign affairs, as something utterly outside the acts and emotions of real life, is shattered by " foreign affairs " that are foreign no longer. But, just as the contemporary mind recoiled, dazed, before the shock of the details of conflict, so, perhaps, it was bound to fail in its attempt to get into perspective the terrific shock and reversal at home. Certainly Miss Sinclair does not get either the one shock or the other into perspective here ; the ecstasy of selflessness which is brought by sacrifice and danger, though in a way it is the whole point of the book (that is why the war section is called " Victory "), comes, not as the

inevitable consummation of what precedes it, but as an abrupt conclusion. Life and death, of course, *are* abrupt ; but art that is completely successful shows a meaning in the very abruptness.

(iii) The Long View

A name which must be recorded with gratitude and respect, for work in which the sociology is subordinate to the humanity, is that of Mrs. Beatrice Kean Seymour. Her most ambitious book is " The Hopeful Journey " ; and this, though only partly a story of war-time, breaks down on a contrast somewhat similar to that which made the weakness of " The Tree of Heaven." There seem to be in it more deaths than there are in life. The slaughter starts early and is steadily maintained. We begin in the middle of the nineteenth century and are brought up to the present day, so that there is scope for the love-affairs of three generations : the interest, apart from the excessive death-rate, centres in the social conceptions governing the relations of men and women. Not, of course, in those conceptions as abstractions, but in the direct exposition given them by mutable and fallible human lives. Mrs. Seymour is too honest an artist to be suspected of writing to

either a thesis or a pattern : but her story does fall into three contrasted stages, each illustrating an attitude. In the first generation, the girl is married early, is utterly ignorant, is borne down by the physical exigencies of matrimony and child-bearing, and never reaches out toward a separate personal existence. She accepts her own wifely subordination and her husband's somewhat casual infidelities as part of an essential order. In the second generation, the girl puts her own career first, fights for it, sacrifices her children to it (not in the obvious way of neglect, but, more subtly and intimidatingly, by the precise opposite : she disheartens them by the care and force with which she tries to exact from them achievements similar to hers)—and lays enormous stress on physical chastity for men and women alike. In the third generation, the girl does not get married to one man till after she has been the mistress of another. The man whose mistress she has been becomes a nuisance to her ; she is tired of him ; but her luck holds—he is killed. She has always really wanted to marry the other man, but he is difficult and odd, and will persist in various forms of immorality, of which the most destructive is success. I have read a number of books in which success destroys

married life by causing the husband to go to too many grand literary parties and neglect the dear old four-feet-on-the-fender domesticity. It never seems to me very convincing. But the husband in "The Hopeful Journey" advances from success to whisky and from whisky to drugs and from drugs to the failure of his lecturing tour in America, and so, *via* failure, to the recovery of his wife's devotion. Never at any time is he more than a lay-figure, to illustrate the relations of the sexes. This is the more conspicuous because all the other characters, right through the three generations, are real. They think, talk, act, with perfect naturalness. Their weaknesses and aspirations are deeply and gently understood. The book, planned on a large scale and carried out with humour and sincerity, is of conspicuous merit.

Even more successful with a panoramic survey of the generations—within the very narrow limits of success that this form allows—is Miss Rose Macaulay, who turns on to all contemporary movements the cool illumination of her mind. She uses the novel for critical purposes; it is significant that "Told by an Idiot," her last and best book, covers too many generations to allow of detailed characterisation, and will be remembered chiefly for its point-of-view.

I do not mean that she cannot create character. She can, and does. But her main gift is for general judgment. Some critics, faced by this puzzle (since it is notorious that no woman can see a joke, keep a secret, or *think*), have hazarded the wide solution that Miss Macaulay does *not* make general judgments for the simple reason that she is a woman and can't. Miss Macaulay, unperturbed, has surpassed herself in a novel where the general judgments are more important than the characters. Of course, her generalisations are false—that goes without saying. All generalisations are false : but some of them are illuminating. Miss Macaulay is always—well, almost always—witty ; I confess I did not find her so in " Mystery at Geneva," but I am told that was a joke I did not see. Men have no sense of humour. In " Told by an Idiot " she fairly blazes with wit. There are, actually, enough good jokes in her first four pages to furnish a whole novel ; and if she does not quite keep up that pitch, it is because nobody could. She has chosen a form which gives admirable scope to her *kind* of wit. She takes a whole family, parents, children, grand-children, through roughly half a century, touching off in each decade the absurdities and illusions which at each point have passed for wisdom,

and insisting, in a refrain which gains by every repetition, that those absurdities and illusions belong to this year or that because they belong to all years—to the human heart itself. This panoramic method precludes the fond detailing of daily life ; it calls for vivid pictures, and it gets them. All the same, Miss Macaulay gropes marvellously deep into some of her characters, especially Rome and Imogen ; she has, as it were, packed twenty novels into one.

A certain hopelessness of outlook is indicated in the title and implied in the most poignant of the scenes. Destructive criticism of life *can* be raised to a power at which it becomes constructive (compare the shattering but inspiring greatness of " Candide ") ; but that is not Miss Macaulay's way. On the other hand, her bitterness is never really hopeless. She has a soft spot for most of the follies she rebukes. Remembering her own main contention, that human folly is universal and eternal, she feels with, and for, its practitioners. She is not afraid of tenderness. She gives, profusely, beauty as well as wit. But she cannot give, because nobody could give, the full picture of the generations. She can throw a light from one angle, and that is all. The rest is darkness.

(iv) Post-War

It was natural that novelists should tackle the immediate emotions of war-time, and fail through the greatness of their subject: it was natural that they should attempt to "place" the war in a longer view, and for the same reason achieve only a partial success. But now the convention that the novelist should handle the excitement, the natural pursuit of distraction, forgetfulness, hurried and crowded experience, which characterised the war years, is giving way to the convention that he must take for his matter the sick disillusionment and discontent which follow, physically, nervously, spiritually, on any period of prolonged and passionate strain. Yet the picture of post-war London drugging or jazzing to its doom has little warrant in real life. The young writer, of course, must tell us what he knows. If he is appalled—or enthralled—by Bohemia or by Belgravia, there is his theme. But he ought to remember that they are both very small places; and the sort of intellectual excitement about life and self-conscious experiments in living which some sections of the community indulge in—and always did—are not the bulk, or the core, of the national experience.

The post-war years have been tackled, or attacked, by so many writers—and all so dashing and scintillating—that to select names is rash. I have already spoken of Mr. McKenna. Mr. Goldring's " Nobody Knows " is characteristic. Mr. Arlen's " Piracy " strains too much after cleverness, and diverges too often into absurdity; but it merits mention. Mr. Geoffrey Moss in " Sweet Pepper " has done wisely to give new colour to the post-war vicissitudes by taking them abroad—to Budapest.

Mr. Goldring writes extremely well, and his book was popular, partly on its merits, and partly because it possesses the quality called " outspokenness." Speaking out has become almost as common as listening in; but, even so, Mr. Goldring is somewhat exceptional. And what a subject! What scope! For is not this the world of the jaded intellectuals, who seduce young women on the plea that they are " releasing their complexes," and dance at night-clubs, and travel in Italy? That wars, revolutions and other occasions of prolonged nervous strain do lead to periods of moral confusion and psychological experiment is an historically established fact: and that men will import fine names for their desires is a fact which needs no history to establish it. But I sometimes wonder if we

do not too much isolate our time. The problems are not new, and, if there is a new way of tackling them, I have not heard of it. Disillusion, unrest, experiment, deliquescence, there have always been—especially among intellectuals. But if our generation flatters itself that it discovered sex, it is wrong. Were there no cakes and ale before girls bobbed their hair and smoked cigarettes? Yes, by Saint Anne, and ginger was hot i' the mouth too. Though, it is true, I have heard of an old lady who said that Tennyson's "Guinevere" was "not fit reading for a medical man," yet seduction was certainly a favourite theme of the novels devoured by Mid-Victorian misses. At the very beginning of the Victorian era, Bulwer Lytton was glorifying free love sentimentally, as Shelley, a few years earlier, had glorified it philosophically (to say nothing of Plato). Mr. Goldring, for his part, avails himself of a short cut which would have been illegitimate in any era. His hero makes a muddle of marriage and a muddle of not being married. That is a worthy problem, because it is real, though no newer than marriage itself. Mr. Goldring might have made his hero transcend it spiritually, or merely be baffled by it. What he does do is to provide him with a "dream-woman" and a happy end-

ing—which is surely the old "romantic" shirking of the issue, and appears very odd at the end of such a work as this.

As for Mr. Arlen, he dashes all over Europe, especially Mayfair (which, of course, *is* to be found all over Europe), in a desperate attempt to present the fullness thereof, and rarely succeeds in getting away from preoccupation with his own worldly wisdom. When he does succeed, he gives us something notable. He feels called upon to write very largely in epigrams, with the result that many of the epigrams are cheap and bad: it is a pity, for he has real wit, and some of the epigrams are excellent. But his most remarkable quality is ingenuousness. He does, incredibly but actually, appear to think that there is something thrilling and romantic—something *interesting* —in a world of wicked wanton women and splendid sardonic men; a world where one epigrammatist says to another, over the glasses: "I'm the legendary man who was born to be the perfect co-respondent, but has failed to live up to the promise of his birth"; a world in which a character can be introduced by the author as "the casual, fearless, handsome Lord Tarlyon," and a woman, alone for the first time with a man much younger than herself, can be de-

scribed as wanting to ask him "how, at his absurd age, he had discovered that restraint is the highest pleasure of *la volupté*." It is all so young, so artless! Let Mr. Arlen ask himself, only once, what he would think of people who talked, in life, as he makes everybody talk in his novel! "It was," he tells us, speaking of a certain pre-war "circle", "the London of Whitehall, Chelsea, Mayfair, Cambridge, Bloomsbury, Downing Street, Oxford, and the Mont Agel." But of course it wasn't. It wasn't London at all, nor even Bagdad. If it ever existed, it can only have been the grimace of a few self-deceivers. One wonders even whether they did deceive themselves. Not very deeply or thoroughly, one suspects. And certainly so able a writer should not allow himself to be deceived by them.

Nevertheless, Mr. Arlen has something of the real stuff in him. When he forgets to be clever, and is gripped by his own narrative, it grips the reader in turn; and there are moments of genuine and tragic emotion in "Piracy" which seemed to give promise of big things. But, as a picture of contemporary manners, that book had no more verisimilitude than the opening chorus of a musical comedy; and in "The Green Hat," which has appeared since, senti-

mentality rages unrebuked, and promise looks likely to give way to disappointment.

The theme of " Sweet Pepper " must be stated brutally if it is to be stated inoffensively. A young, pretty, charming, ordinary English girl sells her body for a few hundred pounds. Now, no doubt, it is the first canon of criticism that nothing is impossible ; but it is the second that everything has to be made possible. And Mr. Moss's method of imputing probability is to attempt to distract us from improbability. Instead of convincing us that this particular girl would have done this particular thing, he transports us to that world, at once post-war and foreign, in which, he suggests, anybody may do anything. He proves, in short, too much. Life is not intelligible, and therefore not interesting, unless seen under the aspect of significance. Of course, cynicism covers a multitude of sins. It is easy to say that it takes all sorts to make the half-world. Deny the existence of moral and physical fastidiousness, and the problem disappears. But then—why attempt to solve it ?

Not that Mr. Moss has written an uninteresting book. On the contrary. He can write. He has a fluent and engaging style, a pretty wit, a sense of situation and a considerable

knowledge of the alleged continent of Europe. He surrounds his heroine with the intoxication of strange sights, wraps her in the cloud of unreality which, to the stolid British eye, always envelops the foreigner, and corrupts her to the haunting music of *Tziganes*. And it is theoretically true that English people will do in Budapest what they would not do in Balham. There is a sense of irresponsibility which comes with alienation from ordinary surroundings and conventions. The human being can say : " Here is no part of my real life—here is a gap, a pause, a vacation, a vacuity : I will do what I please here and now, and it shall have no consequences." But—and this I take to be the moral of Mr. Moss's story—consequences follow actions across the widest map ; a change of air is not a change of heart ; and it is in the obscure recesses of the individual soul that degrees of moral latitude are marked.

Jill is out of a job. Her war-work is over. She must, from Vienna, go back to poverty and uncertainty. She decides to have a holiday first ; but her real feeling is not the desire of a holiday so much as the fear of resuming the struggle. She has a chance of escaping that struggle, of attaining economic security, if only she can raise a certain amount of capital. So,

in the freedom and remoteness of Budapest, she raises it in the manner I have indicated, and then, falling in love, realizes too late what she has done. The plain weakness in such a story is the absence of adequate motive. Much of the local colour is laid on with great skill; but it does not cover the central difficulty. Jill's motive is, in her own word, "funk"; and its weakness is that the funk is purely hypothetical. Nobody can say what he himself or anybody else might do under the urgency of an immediate fear. Economic pressure, sufficiently severe and prolonged, can squeeze human nature into almost any shape. But we are asked to believe that Jill acts merely from fear of what *might* happen to her. If her creator allowed her to fall ever so little in love with her purchasers, or even to argue or delude herself into the belief that she was in love with them, everything would be explicable; but he insists, and *she* insists, that her transactions are purely financial. It will not do. Even as a post-war reaction, it will not do. Not, of course, that I question Mr. Moss's sincerity. No doubt he believes it all—but his business as an artist is to make other people believe. Has he too, perhaps, been led unwittingly astray by the illusion that some fundamental change has taken place

among us—particularly among our young women —in these few latter years ?

That assumption, as we have already seen, underlies much of this type of literature ; it is one which every generation holds and no generation has the right to hold. Modernity was the curse of the ancients. It is deplored in Homer ; it was not always " the thing " at Rome ; and it was distrusted in the Middle Ages—perhaps because they did not know that they *were* Middle. But a different emphasis has been given to the idea by that something not ourselves which makes for publicity. " Modern " is a term of rebuke in the drawing-room, but in the publisher's catalogue it is a term of praise. That is because, for publicity purposes, we must pride ourselves on something more vital and more subtle than the flat achievements of respectability. If we are to be pleased with ourselves, it must be for something other than the things which inspired nineteenth-century complacency. That century was only a Silver Age : it had but the Locksley Hall-mark of success. For us, the sounding brass and the tinkling symbol. We are to practise not virtue but virtuosity, and every simpleton is to have his complexes. And yet——

In a book recommended on the ground that its heroine is " modern to her finger-tips,"

I find that this heroine " knew very little about souls," but " very definitely " did know " the difference between good and evil." There is nothing, of course, in which definiteness is more desirable. One is reminded of " Saki's " Clovis, who explained that his education had consisted of being " whacked at decent intervals " and taught the difference between right and wrong : " there is a difference, you know," he added, " but I've forgotten what it is." But the finger-tip modernity consisted, not in knowledge shared with Clovis and with Eve, but in painful estrangements and misunderstandings due to silence when speech would make all clear. Well, there *is* a possibility of this sort of complication among the super-sensitive ; and, in the view of one great writer, it *is* characteristic of a modernity only slightly less modern than ours. We must remember, even though the fact cannot shake us from our main thesis, that Meredith gave the name of " Modern Love " to a story of silences and estrangements, in which the woman sacrificed herself : and his comment was :

Their sense is with their senses all mixed in,
Destroyed by subtleties these women are !
More brain, O Lord, more brain ! or we shall mar
Utterly this fair garden we might win.

Only—it is possible for stupidity sometimes to masquerade as subtlety. More brain, O Lord, more brain!

And if brains are to be applied to this problem of the modern, we must begin by balancing what has *really* altered against what remains the same. Take, for a contrasting picture, "One of our Grandmothers," by Miss Ethel Colburn Mayne.

Our grandmothers lived before the days of grandmotherly legislation, the duel of sex, race suicide, and the League for Opposing Woman Suffrage. They played the piano—not too well, as a rule; for to play brilliantly was to be odd, and to be odd was to be unsaleable in the marriage-market. The aim of young ladies was to "please the gentlemen." Their choice lay between being wives at twenty or old maids at twenty-one, and—— So one could go on with the platitudes of the subject. Our fathers have told it us; or, failing that, we have told it to our fathers, by way of explaining how each generation stands on the shoulders of the last, and how we exceed our parents in the same measure as they exceeded theirs. It is easy to stress the social changes that two generations have brought: it is equally easy to remember and insist that the changes are less important

than the things which do not change; that what you gain on the roundabouts of fashion you lose on the swings of the pendulum; and that there were brains under bonnets as indubitably as there were legs under crinolines. What is *not* easy is to reconstruct the sameness in that different world—to estimate how far the problems have varied, how far they have remained—to picture the New Woman putting out the first timorous and tentative wings of her now triumphant endeavour.

This very difficult task Miss Mayne has attempted, and remarkably achieved. The quiet subtlety of her manner (in the early chapters a little spoilt by the mannerisms of Henry James, but flowing more freely and simply as the story progresses) is completely suited to her theme. Her style is often hard to follow; it is also, less often but still sometimes, almost dull. There is surprisingly little story to get excited about. A girl is wooed and left by the conventional predatory male of fiction—unconventionalised completely as he is under Miss Mayne's merciless analysis; a less skilful and more honest wooer appears; there is an engagement, broken off and renewed; marriage, with no guarantee of living happily ever after, ends the book. Round the forceful and beautiful

but pathetic Millie, with her young pride and eager questionings and quick despairs and facile histrionics, the minor characters, the moods of time and place and atmosphere, are woven with consistent skill. Millie is a brilliant pianist, with a touch of genius and more than a touch of temperament. Had she been her own granddaughter, she would have contrived to get scholarships, opportunities: she would have studied in Berlin, Munich, or Vienna; she would have taken the concert-platform by storm; above all, she would have lived her own life, and, when offered marriage, would have been able to fulfil her wish to compare its promise with some tested alternative. As it is, in 1860 and Miss Mayne's pages, she is limited by poverty and prejudice. She cannot even take the step that would free her from the society of her stepmother—unless she goes to the altar. Her father, a ferociously weak creature of eyebrows and moustaches, flatters himself that he has indulged her to excess because he has spared her those culinary labours which he himself pursues with the passion of an artist: he is a retired officer, but his social scope is limited by his kitchen, and his second wife wins him with a *vol-au-vent*. Millie goes to an aunt, but after a time discovers her essential *un-*

wantedness—and her father remains hostile to her plan of earning her own living by teaching music. Marriage remains.

Exquisite is the picture of Millie's young-ladyhood, which she spends in a garden pictured to herself, by herself, as " the high Hall-garden," and diversifies—apart from the piano—by the copying of " extracts " into extract-books. (It has been said that the England of the age of Tennyson was a land flowing with milk and water: but to " young ladies " " Maud " came as a blaze of romantic passion. Are we in our twentieth-century insolence quite sure that the young ladies were not partly right? And anyway the scene of Miss Mayne's book is Ireland.) Follows the lover, but Millie is both ignorant and unawakened: then the vulgar stepmother, the sojourn with the aunt, the second lover, the return home. At this point the most finely conceived character in the book, the " foxy man," the stepmother's father, takes a hand, and in a scene of extraordinary delicacy and genuine beauty he explains to Millie the unmentionable thing—the stir of sexual desire that is tormenting and urging and frustrating her. For she has the double problem—sex and art: her " own " life could never, in even the most enlightened age, be

lived to herself—only the urgency of sex is doubly mysterious to her because of her "temperament."

It would be an idle crudity, then, to summarise the contrast by suggesting that only externals have changed: for externals affect internals. Where the claim of our "moderns" fails is that they lay too much emphasis on one *kind* of life, as if that in itself were modernity. Their limits are social and geographical rather than temporal and historical. For instance—the typical and extreme instance—in Mr. Aldous Huxley's "Antic Hay" are represented the shining cleverness and morbidity of a small and literate and restless world.

Gumbril's Patent Small Clothes, a sort of trouser which enables the leanest to sit with comfort on the hardest seat: such is the basis of Mr. Huxley's fantasy. It is, if the inept metaphor may pass, his standing joke. He returns to it at intervals, with the gusto of Artemus Ward's tiger, who was seen "with a large and well selected assortment of seats of trowsis in his mouth." Why the sedentary position should be considered comic is a mystery. It is the position of judges and other awful and intimidating figures. What, according to tradition, did "the haughty and the

strong" do in "the high places"? They sat in them. There is no Professor without his Chair. The life sedentary is the life thoughtful and debonair. But Mr. Huxley will have his little joke, and it must be one that, however inexplicably, every schoolboy shares. Presumably that is why he is found playing "Beaver" twelve months after the rest of the world had ceased to find it amusing. That is why he thinks it worth while to print blasphemous rhymes which the crudest undergraduate would scarcely repeat in a tipsy conversation. That is why he presents us with a young lady whose eyes to the idealist look "plumbless with thought" when she is actually thinking: "If I wait till the summer sale, the crêpe de Chine will be reduced by at least two shillings a yard." The fact is that the cheap, the obvious, the popular, has had at times a fatal fascination for Mr. Huxley. It is his Dark Angel, struggling with the Muse for possession of what is, when all's said on the other side, one of the rarest and most promising intelligences of our time. "Little Mexican," a volume of short stories published later than "Antic Hay," shows the good angel firing the bad one out, and maturity almost attained: two of the stories, "Uncle Spencer"

and "Young Archimedes," are little short of perfection. And there are passages in "Antic Hay" itself of a pure and rhythmic beauty: passages so fine, so just, that they move one like good music. Casimir Lypiatt, the would-be genius, trying to drown the still small voice of self-knowledge in the violence of self-praise: Emily, the gentle lover—Mr. Huxley has drawn, in these, pictures of a really exquisite truth. He has tragic moments. His general reflections, when they are serious, are profound. The beauty and wisdom of his descriptive passages are such as to make moderate laudation of them seem skimpy and grotesque. They are real: they flow and sing: they could not be other than they are. And then—plump!—on the next page we are back again in a painful unreality. The incredible feebleness of the jokes about pneumatic trousers is a symptom not of mental inadequacy, but of spiritual uncertainty. And the depressingly regular irregularity of the sexual relations is simply vacuous. People do not seduce each other at sight, nor, if they did, would their seductions have any human interest. I have no quarrel with Mr. Huxley for writing about the degenerate and the dyspeptic; they have immortal souls, and are just as important as

anybody else ; but he will have to rid himself of the illusion that people are interesting *because* they are degenerate and dyspeptic before he can hope to find scope for his really splendid talents. And what is true of him might be said, with some modification, of a whole class.

(v) General

But, if we are really to measure progress, or decadence, or even difference, we must contrast treatment as well as subject : it will not do to put the behaviour of Mr. Huxley's contemporary young man against that of Miss Mayne's grandmothers : we must compare the novels that the Victorians wrote with what we write, their approach with ours. We have already seen that their handling of sex is considerably more " modern " than is implied in the more facile of to-day's judgments : we have now to look for an advance in the treatment of specific matters, and to set against our own " sociological " type the " society novel " (for we need go no further back) of the 'nineties. Take, for instance, the preoccupation with the prostitute. The new fashion was set by Mr. Filson Young's " Sands of Pleasure," and emphasised by Mr. W. L.

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George's "Bed of Roses"—both of them extremely good as well as extremely popular books, though Mr. Young's is of a far austerer and severer type than the other. But when one says that the new fashion was "set" so recently, one must not forget that Gissing gave to this theme all the bitter realism as well as the unquenchable romanticism which combined in his strange unsatisfied and unsatisfying genius. What was new in Mr. Young's book was the method. He too was both realist and romantic: but in him the two impulses did not conflict. To his realism he conceded a stark objective study of the yielding to physical passion: on the romantic side he drew a noble picture of a different lure, a different goddess—creation in work, as against the expense of spirit: and he wrote of the building of a lighthouse more poetically, more lyrically, than of the pleasures of the senses. This, and the sheer beauty of his style, gave his work a distinction which subsequent handlers of the same subject have missed. Mr. George's approach was again quite different, but scarcely less arresting. To him, the problem was definitely social—one might almost say economic; and, one sometimes suspects, it is in the regions of sociology and economics that his deepest

interests lie. But to him as *novelist* the main social fact is woman: and his books are good precisely in proportion as he objectifies his interest in created character, and bad precisely in proportion as he allows himself to label human beings as social facts. It is a common defect of modern novelists to dwell too exclusively on the physical side of love. This might be explained as a natural and not unhealthy reaction against the detestable sentimentality which used, in the more anæmic specimens of Victorian fiction, to represent falling in love as a decorous social act like leaving cards, or a pleasant romantic act like singing to a guitar among the roses. But the reaction has been carried too far—not too far for propriety (which anyway is irrelevant to æsthetics), but too far for verisimilitude. Mr. George's talents preserve him from crude error: he does, I think, tend to limit those talents by emphasising physical attraction as a social problem instead of "placing" it as an individual experience: but criticism is easier to level at the tendency as it appears in others who lack his special gift. It is not important to name names; the tendency itself is important.

The problem is one, first, of generalisation as such, and, secondly, of generalisations about

the sexes. There are two ways of conceiving character as the subject-matter of fiction. You can conceive it as what it is—individual, concrete, unaccountable; and then, if you succeed in creating the illusion of reality, criticism has no more to ask. Or you can conceive it as belonging to sections, classes, types; only, in that case, you are assuming an almost universal validity which can be contradicted and confounded by a few irreconcilable instances. Thus, it is the dearest convention of the British stage that all curates are feeble-minded. In real life, as everybody knows, not all curates are feeble-minded. If we happen to know a feeble-minded curate called John Smith (all the characters in this apologue are imaginary, and no reference is intended to any living person), we think of him first as the individual John Smith, secondly as feeble-minded, and only thirdly and incidentally as a curate. But, in the theatre, we begin to giggle the moment he ambles on to the stage. A really creative dramatist would be able to give us a John Smith who should linger in our memories as John Smith—feeble-minded if you like; even, if you insist, a curate because feeble-minded; but never, never just feeble-minded because a curate.

Now, far too many novelists quote or devise or assume generalisations about the sexes. "Like all women, she had no sense of honour." "Being a woman, she had no sense of humour." "If only he had beaten her, she would have loved him." "Love is of man's life a thing apart; 'tis woman's whole existence." "He for God only, she for God in him." "For woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse." "*Her* womanly intuition." "*His* male intelligence." Well, my male intelligence tells me that, wherever there are physiological differences, there are certainly mental and emotional differences to correspond: but it needs no womanly intuition to observe that, whatever those differences between man and woman may be, they are far too subtle and variable to be caught and bottled in an epigram. One has only to say to oneself "matriarchy" or "exogamy," to remember that nothing varies more, according to time and place, than sexual conventions and proclivities.

The wildest dreams of Kew are the facts of Khatmandhu,
And the crimes of Clapham chaste in Martaban.

All the same, though we have gone astray in a hundred ways about sex; though we are conventional in our unconventionality, and

timid in our daring, and pettifogging in our romance, we have learnt something, we have endured and believed something, and our art may thereby, when we have shed our eccentricities, be permanently enriched.

In the austerer fields of intellectual speculation, we can take less comfort to ourselves. Father Knox, in "Sanctions," has given us a not unfair picture of to-day's "intellectuals"; and it is discouraging. It deliberately challenges comparison with "The New Republic," and fails in three ways to sustain the comparison. In the first place, it is not nearly so funny in the comic parts or so passionately eloquent in the serious. In the second, it has not nearly so rich a field of contemporary genius to call upon. In "The New Republic," Jowett and Huxley, Ruskin and Spencer, Clifford and Matthew Arnold were all recognisable and all ridiculous; that was because in real life they were all worth recognising and ridiculing. There is no denying that, by comparison, we live in a pygmy age. In the third place, the central theme (let me but point to the title) is precisely the one that exercised Mallock's mind, and Father Knox is content to reach very much the same conclusion after a very much more elementary debate.

Of course, no conclusion can be drawn from a mere comparison of Father Knox's particular achievement and Mr. Mallock's ; but I repeat that his picture is not unfair ; and it may serve as a useful reminder that, if we are to justify our claims and egoisms, we must " think ourselves back " into the tradition of ages greater than ours. Experiment is not enough.

V

STRAIGHTFORWARD

THERE are novels which strike one as simply novels, insubordinate to preciser labels: not distinguishable, however, by any mere negation, not grouped together by the fact that they belong to no group, but rather examples, solid and positive, of the main type and tradition—superlatively and essentially novels. So of some scenes, placid and homelike, with the generalising blue sky curved over them and altered by the smoke from unseen chimneys, we exclaim—not "This is Surrey," not "This is Devon," but only "This is England." The whole is nearer than the parts.

We look, then, to the novels we are now to consider, for general rather than for special virtue. We shall not be able to call them psychological, or *picaresque*, or sociological, or new: it is enough that they belong to the same tradition as "Tom Jones" and "Vanity Fair"

and "Middlemarch" and "The Egoist." The type which is broad enough to embrace these four may seem too broad for critical handling; yet common sense will supply the criterion over which nice discrimination boggles. The four books I have named (I could name scores of others in the same category) may differ among themselves in ways innumerable, but have one thing in common—that the novelist builds up, creates, a world objective and external to himself, and his characters move in it as people move about in the streets we know; the interest is in the story—not the plot as detachable from the characters, for a detachable plot belongs to the sphere of the chess-problem rather than of art—but the story in the sense of *what the characters do to each other*. Interaction is the essence; and when we contrast novels of this kind with the kind whose interest lies in introspection, our old dividing line becomes clear. Novels biographical or sociological will incline now to one side of the line, now to the other; but, because their interest is special, because it lies in a special character or a special setting, they do not belong here.

Of living writers, in the kind which it is possible to call three-dimensional, but perhaps easier to call traditional, Mr. Arnold Bennett—

the Mr. Bennett of "The Old Wives' Tale" and "Whom God Hath Joined"—must bear the palm. Mr. Wells and Mr. Galsworthy both have sociological axes to grind; that does not make their work necessarily worse or better, but it makes it different, and on the difference of Mr. Zangwill (another rival) there is again no need to dwell. But my concern is with the "new" writers; and of these, in the traditional kind, Mr. Hugh Walpole is the most distinguished. About the respective merits of his books I am something of a heretic; but the man who wrote "The Captives" or, indeed, the man who wrote "The Dark Forest" (but that, as we have seen, is of a different type), can sustain comparison with any living writer, old or new.

All sects, kinds, classes, divisions, shade off into ambiguity at the edges, but there is no stretch by which I can include Mr. Archibald Marshall (who was born in the same year as Mr. Wells) among the new writers. And yet I am compelled to bring him in, not that he has exerted, like Mr. Wells, any direct influence on the writers who *are* new, but rather because he does so admirably what they do not think it worth while to do at all. He illustrates divergent tendencies by preserving a method

from which they too easily and scornfully diverge. Mr. Marshall's points are scored so quietly—so great a reserve of strength is left uncalled upon, and perhaps by many unsuspected—that it is doubtful whether he has anything like the reputation he deserves. His main themes are the country house and the county family, the tremendous legend of patriarchal duties, frenetic sports, and narrow but unshaken loyalties. There is an atmosphere—is it physical or moral?—something compounded of leather and custom, of pelts and peace, which enshrouds you in the old English homes; Mr. Marshall is almost unrivalled in conveying it.

Almost—not quite. For in "The Family" Mrs. Mordaunt has given us the same atmosphere, but, with it, a story on a grander scale than anything Mr. Marshall has attempted—a narrative tragic and august, in which we hear, as in all true tragedy, the cry of the universal trouble.

Here is unquestionably a beautiful and powerful work of art, detailed yet unified, lengthy yet concentrated, full of thought, of feeling, of knowledge and of sympathy.

The Hebbertons were a good, solid, old-fashioned, Victorian, hunting, county family.

"Eleven young Hebbertons lived to reach maturity." Over some of those who did not, Mrs. Hebberton's spoken comment was: "Perhaps after all it was as well—He knows best." The children's relation to their father is indicated in the single ensuing sentence: "The Hebberton children always took it for granted that the 'He' referred to was their father." All the queer, warm, awkward intimacies, the cycle of occupations and excitements, the jokes and affections and misunderstandings, of a large and varied family grow under our eyes as we read. The sharpest misunderstanding is between Sebastian and his father—the sporting squire, none the less bound to his conventions because they are not moral or æsthetic scruples, but only contradictory and rather coarse habits of mind and body, and Sebastian, delicate, sensitive, nervous—always fatally hesitating on the brink of even the simplest decision. Sebastian was destined for the army, but while he was living with his "crammer" he got into trouble with a girl. "They were neither of them the least depraved. The girl was frankly in love and as frankly animal in her appetite." Sebastian was brought home in disgrace, and, money being very scarce, did not go back. To his father's blind prejudice the thing presented

itself without moral complications : " It's reason enough for my not wasting any more of my money on the young cub, but it's no reason why we should all go about with long faces." To the shrinking, pondering, remorseful soul of the boy this crude incongruity struck painful and incomprehensible : his career was to be taken from him for a thing which was yet somehow only a sort of smoking-room jest ! Then came the telegram to say the girl was dying. He went and found her dead—in child-birth. His father had not let him know even that there was a child coming, had not given him the chance of what he would have considered reparation. Sebastian never forgave that. He enlisted, was sent to a foreign station, fell ill—and years afterwards came back a wreck, frightened, almost imbecile, incurable—and yet strangely the same. He came to Pauline, who is the fullest and wisest character of them all. But to Pauline no brief sketch could attempt to do justice—to her humour and force and wide courageous sympathies. The family, of course, having consistently lived beyond its income, came to a financial smash. The father, who had all his life had his own way, broke under the strain, naturally, sooner than the mother : the change in *her* character is one of

the subtlest and truest of all Miss Mordaunt's true and subtle touches. Pauline, if anyone, is the heroine. Easier, but equally complete, is the selfish and stupid Julia. The younger children, growing up to fend for themselves in a changing world, developed on more "common-sense" lines than the older. But it is all wonderful. Pauline's disastrous marriage to a clergyman much older than herself, righteous and self-righteous and of vaguely perverted senses, contains by itself enough observation and characterisation to furnish a whole novel—here it is but an episode.

If all, or many, or a few, of Mrs. Mordaunt's other books had been on this scale, she would have ranked among the half-dozen greatest writers of the day. Even as it is, she has done much else of distinction.

Another novelist more admirable than admired is Mr. Edward Booth, whose "The Tree of the Garden" is an enormously ambitious book, and rises without effort to the height of its ambition. The heroine is a primitive creature, but capable by nature of heroic passion, and this passion is expressed in uncouth language which never becomes crude on the one hand or "literary" on the other. Simplicity is so much harder to draw than com-

plexity !—there is no drapery to hide the stark lines, to disguise any weakness of drawing. Mr. Booth has the vision and the vocabulary of a poet, and is subtle enough to be simple.

Mr. Swinnerton is, to a hasty view, much subtler ; but he has not yet fully shown, though he certainly does not lack, the last fine touch of subtlety. He never quite avoids the appearance of being clever. Of the merit and importance of his work there can be no question, but it has a restlessness ; its achievement perpetually just disappoints after its promise, not because the achievement is small (which it is not), but because the promise is so big. With the assured touch of a writer who has left experiment behind him, he is still always making experiments. It is good, however, that anyone with such high standards should have attained so much popularity. What is not good is that the standards have been on the whole less nearly attained as the popularity has increased. In his later books, Mr. Swinnerton —influenced, consciously or unconsciously, I surmise, by Mr. Arnold Bennett's example— has lost some of his own delicacy and failed to win in return a compensating robustness. Contrast " The Chaste Wife," an early work,

with "The Three Lovers," a comparatively recent one.

Man is born to relations as the sparks fly upward. In fact, as various philosophers have observed, a man *is* his relations: and most of us are poor relations. It is impossible to know the truth about anything without knowing the truth about everything else; the relative presupposes the Absolute: and this is why jesting Pilate did not stay for an answer. Mr. Swinnerton's method, in "The Chaste Wife," is to pursue the truth even to the third and fourth implication. He regards no fact as single, but every fact as a link in the chain of evidence, and the evolution of his characters often depends on the missing link. He never makes a statement and leaves it at that—he is always searching, darting, expanding—he is always eager, patient, various, alert. His jumps, though rarely unreasonable, are sometimes baffling. He has an almost Meredithian subtlety of transition: his connections have to be sought in the subconscious. Consequently there is in his narrative, especially in his convincing conversations, some of the engaging or irritating irrelevance of real life. The main impression left by this novel is one of extreme cleverness combined with urgent but frequently frustrated

sincerity ; the quickness and complexity and " all-roundness " of his search for psychological exactitude suffice to give a wonderful reality to such of his scenes and characters as " come off," but leave the rest blurred and uncompleted. He attempts, perhaps, too much —is not content to select, to abstract, on clear lines and according to definite principles, as art must do ; and when, in one conspicuous instance, he sinks to the use of grotesquely unlikely and unnecessary coincidence, the falsehood " swears " with his intricate efforts after veracity. The qualities of these defects, however, are remarkable. Some atmospheres are rendered so well that the men and women moving through them have the concreteness, the three dimensions, of reality ; the plot, though quite simple, is unfolded with such conscientious reticence that one actually and painfully holds one's breath. " The Chaste Wife," in fact, is so surprisingly good that one has difficulty in believing in it—one almost feels there must be some mistake.

Priscilla is the fine and sensitive flower of an exquisitely ordered and cultured and lettered home. Her father is one of those literary men with money in whom appreciation has blurred perception, so that they write large books on

little subjects and get their facts a trifle wrong. Her mother is beautiful, wise, quiet—a guiding and consoling presence. Her brother is a publisher and a conversationalist. The physical and spiritual qualities of Priscilla make her the delightful centre of a delightful world. There is something essential about her, some essence distilled as it were from a thousand fragrances. But she has solidity too. Over against this household is Stephen's. Stephen's brain is masterful and clear, his work honest and forcible, his education bitterly acquired amid the humiliations and exigencies of extreme poverty. He lives in the upper half of a shabby house in Islington, with his father—" the old man "—and his younger sister and brother, Dorothy and Roy. Of Stephen himself I cannot feel sure, but the others are extraordinarily real. It is Dorothy who says that the number on the door is " only to prevent the postman from calling " ; it is she who tells Priscilla that " the old man " is " one of the worst." In every phrase she lets fall one is conscious of her courageous and ironical simplicity, her unostentatious *eagerness* towards life. The old man is the old man of the sea. Debonair and drunken, hating Stephen with the pitiless hatred of jealousy and bleeding him of every obtainable

penny, he clings horribly on his son's labouring back. The social problem is the bridging of the gulf between these two households by Stephen's and Priscilla's mutual love; the spiritual problem is the coming between Stephen and Priscilla, after their marriage, of an unhappy incident in Stephen's past. Mr. Swinnerton tackles Priscilla's reaction from Stephen's confession according to the broad principles of psychological fact; and he hunts after exactitude here, as everywhere, with an urgent discursive devotion to detail.

I quote from the description of the journey which begins Stephen's and Priscilla's honeymoon:

> . . . For one moment she was filled with the wish to express her thoughts—all her thrilling thoughts—as though for once she could say with absolute clearness all that she had always supposed she could never tell anybody. She had a longing to break down all these reserves, both timid and necessary, which all of us (except the merely liquid) guard with such jealous care. To say to Stephen, "This, and this finally and alone, is the real I!" It seemed to be a supreme need of her being—to say in some amazingly permitted speech of pure lucidity that which would for ever make Stephen's mind one mind with hers. It was a fantastic and an engrossing thought that filled and permeated her attention. If *only* she might once be granted

> the power of clear expression! The power to give herself utterly into Stephen's keeping! Then there could never be any misunderstanding, and she and Stephen would be one in reality. The train's quick jogging fell in time with her imaginings, and her dream seemed to take on a poetic rhythm. Stephen, Stephen, said the train, echoing her heart.

"The Three Lovers" provides a striking contrast. It has a formal, even a conventional, plot. The heroine is pretty, ambitious, conceited, bewildered, dazzling, pathetic: she is human. And she is wooed in characteristic fashion by three typical men, and the best man wins. Mr. Swinnerton is very, very acute: it seems ridiculous to suspect him of not seeing how conventional his triple arrangement and happy ending are. There is the cold, sensual, imposing, ingratiating, elegant, æsthetically-exquisite Jew, the connoisseur: there is the handsome, laughing, fascinating young man-of-the-world-about-town, the Bohemian: there is the faithful, middle-aged, strong, silent man, the hero—with, so to speak, a clean limb sticking out at each corner. Mr. Swinnerton's command of happy phrase and subtle suggestion is lavished on the task of lending novelty to these creatures of the novel, of turning the typical into the individual. He does not suc-

ceed, because success in this kind is not attainable; but it would be unfair to name the failure without stressing the brilliance of the attempt.

Harry, the all-but-irresistible charmer, the odious type which one meets in so many books and never, never in real life, woos Patricia with a pleasant impetuosity. She warms, she thrills, but she distrusts; she detects his shallowness; at the critical moment she declares that she cannot marry him—"It's too great a risk." Harry is profoundly surprised. "Who on earth," he demands, "*asked* you to marry me?" Marriage, he explains, is a survival of the economic dependence of women; people don't marry nowadays: realising that "the delight of love doesn't last," they enter upon love-affairs with the full intention that the affairs shall not last either. Patricia is not convinced. Monty, the connoisseur, woos differently. Patricia enjoys the sense of power which the rousing of his passion gives her: she plays with fire, and finds she doesn't like it. And then Edgar, the third lover, the strong, silent, clean-limbed—you had guessed it? Perhaps, if you had not been certain to guess it, I could scarcely have found it in my heart to give it away. Do not imagine that Mr. Swinnerton

fails to keep up the excitement ; but, in leaving the world of suggestion and half-perception for that of a more obvious realism, he has not approached reality, he has abandoned it.

Mr. Stacy Aumonier is unequal, but memorable at his best. If he has aimed, and quite legitimately, at the popularity he has won, it has been by no easy concessions, but by the strict meditation of technique. If he plays variations on the " modern " theme, with him modernity is not an obsession, it is only one theme out of many, and he does in the main labour to carry on the broad and old tradition.

Mr. Cannan has, at any rate in certain of his books, attempted something which would have been tremendous if it had come off : a sort of broken epic in prose, to establish in our vision once and for all the monstrous edifice of Victorian industrialism, and to demonstrate the spiritual triumph of the laughing, dreaming, drinking, suffering artist-type over the material ugliness which seems to crush it. But he fails, for he too openly takes sides ; indeed, I doubt whether I ought to be considering him in this place at all ; I place his novels with the objective and the concrete only because that is where they apparently aspire to be. Really, his picture is distorted by illusion. There is the note

of vindictiveness in his contrasts. But his characters of importance are so numerous that only a real vital spark in each could keep them all clear before us: thus they become object-lessons instead of objects, and welter in a general confusion, a darkness as of death. There was a huge ugliness in the material success and self-satisfaction of the Victorians—granted; but surely there was something noble too? Besides, mere protest is, itself, not particularly beautiful. Great art will treat ugliness beautifully: that, indeed, is what great art is for. (Where will you find an uglier story than "Lear"?) But Mr. Cannan tries to convince us of the ugliness he depicts by making the depiction ugly. There is a hard, cold barrenness about these books of his: his sentences are as uncomfortable as yellow bricks. Against this must be put an artistic sincerity—ferocious and contemptuous indeed, but courageous—and very considerable intellectual power.

If Mr. Marshall could be dragged in only by a negative, what of Mr. W. B. Maxwell, whose first book was published, I believe, but two years later than Mr. Marshall's? Yet I must pay my tribute. Mr. Maxwell's enormous popularity has done him disservice with the people who measure success by limitation of

appeal; but he is an artist of a high order. Sometimes, it is true, his plots are of a ludicrously "so the King married the beggar-maid and lived happily ever after" kind. But sometimes they are tragic in the noble sense. Even "Vivien," which is only a glorious novelette, *is* glorious. The energy, the abundance, of it! And how dramatic in its accumulated anguish is "A Remedy Against Sin"!

Mr. John Owen may be mentioned for a good book, "Richard Gregory." He might be setting out to refute the maxim that "to the poor all things are poor." His hero—but indeed it is, in Burke's phrase, "not gross adulation, but uncivil irony" to suggest the heroic in connexion with mean-spirited little Robert Gregory—is born to one of the most degrading forms of poverty: to that place in life where, in contrast with abundance on the one hand and the tragic misery of starvation on the other, there is only a barely-sufficient succession of unappetising meals. Adventure, escape, ardour, passion, even elemental generosity and greed, are subdued to the horrible cult of "keeping up appearances." Gregory has not the physical courage to break loose, nor the moral courage to resist the special temptations which assail an alien nature in that

world, nor the spiritual insight to comprehend and transmute ordinary experience, nor the dullness of content, nor the mere vulgar desire for material luxury. It is impossible to convey, without very lengthy quotation, the patient art with which his pathetically snobbish idealism and his feeble sinfulness are conveyed. Absolutely merciless in the exposure of what would lead the hard and the superficial to contempt, Mr. Owen leaves us always conscious of the divine quality of pity in his own understanding.

There are faults and discrepancies in the writing. Gregory habitually expresses himself in a way which, though not extravagantly "literary," would be quite impossible for a comparatively uneducated man who has never found much time or enthusiasm for reading; and he winces when others make little slips of grammar which, in point of fact, you might hear in any Oxford or Cambridge common-room (for no one speaks such pedantically correct English as that wincing implies—nor, indeed, does Mr. Owen write it). But these details are negligible. Even the somewhat flat method of narrative and description into which Mr. Owen sometimes descends is negligible. The arresting, the exciting thing—the thing which makes one anxious not to miss a word—

is the remorseless pity with which the character of Gregory is probed and revealed. It is not merely that the psychological analysis *does not* go wrong: one feels that it *cannot* go wrong, any more than in that sense life itself can go wrong. For the boy lives, the man lives: the development is inevitable, the word is life's own. Though there is no attempt at the obvious brilliancies, a style which can make so complete a revelation of such intimate experience is a very delicate and powerful instrument. Poor Gregory, with his weak, pathetic craving for the fine things of life, which he thrusts aside in that region of the soul where they are attainable, because for him they go only with the social amenities! Poor little snob, believing that you cannot even appreciate the sky and the stars unless you are a "gentleman"! —and endeared to us because what he desires from gentility *is* the meaning of sky and stars, and not the indulgences of the flesh.

Miss Eyles would perhaps be puzzled, and perhaps perturbed, to find herself in the present category; she aims, I imagine, at propaganda. She writes in violent protest against social evils; but, when somebody comes alive under her fingers, the propagandist turns artist in spite of herself. Her "Hidden Lives" bears even

in its title the menace of the subconscious; but she is to be distinguished from the "psychologists" by her method; she treats the facts objectively, she does not exalt a particular explanation of them. She deals as directly with the horrors of nervous disease and mental aberration as with the smells and contagions of the slums; she would appear to have studied both subjects with the same courageous directness and thoroughness. Her plot is of the kind which used to be called "daring"; but nobody could suspect her of having been driven to it by anything short of a high moral enthusiasm. The heroine is a woman-doctor, full of schemes for the social regeneration of mankind by the application of common sense and scientific knowledge. She (and, it must be confessed, she alone in the book—but it suffices) is accorded objective existence. She is alert, radiant, self-confident, slightly impatient, slightly supercilious—active, wholesome, "modern"; and she falls in love with an ascetic priest who regards his love for her as a temptation of the flesh and the devil. There is a hideous study of the priest's mental decay: his asceticism, we are given to understand, is morbid in origin, being the forerunner of a general collapse; the nature of that collapse will be anticipated

by those who remember the last act of Ibsen's "Ghosts." It is characteristic of Miss Eyles's method that she gives his dreams with the fullness that would be required by a professional psycho-analyst undertaking the "case," and yet with an eloquence that might almost be called poetical. The woman-doctor, being convinced that the asceticism is merely a false morality which can be traced to repressions and overcome by experience (she does not guess the true nature of the malady), makes love to the priest. All her cool wisdom deserts her in the agony of her passion. Disaster follows disaster. She has an illegitimate child, and loses in consequence her social position. A rest-house for the poor, into which she has put all her savings, is burnt down. Her child is murdered.

The mere capitulation sounds almost absurd, nor would sincerity be enough to redeem the story from absurdity, if sincerity were all. The best tribute to Miss Eyles's literary power is that each blow, as it falls, seems the inevitable outcome of what has gone before. And there is no sentimental attempt to represent the heroine as the blameless victim of unmerited misfortunes. She has to face the fact of her own mistakes, to own how much they have

contributed to her sufferings, and to resolve, even so, to turn those sufferings to the good: as each personal prop, each mortal stay, is broken, the lesson is driven in and in, that the spirit utterly dedicated to human service must be exempt from the solicitation of human pleasures, and must learn from loneliness the strength to be alone.

A ghastly, startling, haunting book, full of deliberate and explicit statement about those evils in life which are most generally left unstated: full of protest, too, and judgment, which may for those who judge differently mar the effects of the whole: but rich, beyond question, in literary merit and spiritual exaltation. Despite the thinness and abstraction of the minor characters, the story's the thing. It is so with all this group; and yet under this head, more than under any other, I have been conscious of uncertainty in the grouping, of overlappings and interlockings, and edges gradually rubbed away. It is natural: for here I have tried to assemble those whose idiosyncrasy it is that they possess no idiosyncrasy, and yet to insist upon their positive similarities. I have thought of them as "straightforward"—and tried to show that straightforwardness in this sense includes delicacy. I have tried to estab-

lish their place in a tradition—but nothing is less solid, less definable, than a tradition. And I have been compelled to choose names more arbitrarily, and to omit names more freely, than where I was dealing with the methods of a definite " school." But I hope that the minor contradictions will not obscure the main argument : I believe that they will not do so for anyone who recognises what my principle of classification is, and knows that all classification brings contradiction with it. Is not " Tom Jones " biographical ? Literally, yes ; but not at all in the sense in which I have used that word to describe a separable type ; for Tom Jones does not concentrate the interest of the story in himself ; his whole world lives and moves ; it is not a question of one character's finding itself—or even of one character's finding another character and making a love-match of it—it is a question of a created world. But then—it may be objected—what of " Hidden Lives " ? Since I accord reality to but one character in that, does it not become in the extreme sense " biographical," and why has it figured here among the books of three dimensions ? It figures here because it is at home among its fellows : it is not of the *kind* that concentrates interest, it diffuses interest, it is

concerned with the story not the character, the world not the individual: that it does not succeed in all its characterisation is irrelevant to its type. Some will think that others of the books I have called "straightforward" are biographical (or sociological, or whatnot). I repeat that there is overlapping, there is contradiction: there *must* be: types are not sharply defined. Yet I trust that some sense of the great tradition may have emerged, and may remain.

VI

SMALLER GROUPS

(I) The Neo-Russians

WE have accomplished our main division, and must now throw out snaring-ropes after this or that group or tendency. We have seen that the old mechanical division between men-novelists and women-novelists no longer holds. It is no longer usual, for critical purposes, to segregate women. If we have still not rounded Cape Turk, we have at least joined the ladies. And, indeed, it is very clear that there is no common feminine principle discernible in women's books ; if there were, it would confound under an unintelligible unity Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. It is easy to ask what " Emma " would have been like if written by a man, or " David Copperfield " if written by a woman. There is no answer.

It does so happen, however, that round about

the year 1910 there burst upon an appreciative world a number of first novels by young women, most of whom became at a stroke, if only in a small way, famous ; that these novels, though varying exceedingly among themselves, had a common note which, for want of a subtler word, I will call subtlety—a wistfulness too, a sort of lingering devotion to the passing beauty of the world, which young men had not expressed in quite the same fashion, though doubtless they had experienced it with the same acuteness. The phenomenon cannot be dismissed as a coincidence. Such writers as Miss Ethel Sidgwick, Miss Amber Reeves, Miss Viola Meynell, Miss Rosalind Murray, had all of them grown up in exquisitely intellectual surroundings, to accept unquestioningly that whole range of intellectual appreciation from which women had previously been excluded. I harp on the word " intellectual " ; it is vital. For though there had been women novelists before, and some enormously and deservedly popular, few of them had challenged masculine complacency either in erudition or in speculation. There had been George Eliot, of course, and there was still Mrs. Humphry Ward. But these proclaimed themselves exceptions ; the newcomers, however exceptional they may in fact have been, whether

in talent or in opportunity, took their kingdom for granted as a general and natural right. That was the revolution. And it was largely a Russian revolution. I do not know which members of this group had studied which of the great Russians in particular; I do not even know that every single one of them had directly, and with intention, studied the Russians at all; but that there was an influence, an emanation, an inspiration, I think certain.

Here, then, was a school roughly definable in time and character. Each member of it has developed or accentuated an individuality of expression, leading her away from the others, but not one of them has been a disappointment in the sense of *losing* individuality and degenerating into commercialism—that horrible gilt-edged fate which always overhangs precocious genius. And, though in a sense the school has broken up, the new method has been established. Of later users of it, Miss E. B. C. Jones is typical. She has a finely appreciative and discriminating mind, but uses it too nicely, and so invests her characters with an atmosphere of vagueness and faintness. They are sometimes so conscious of intelligence as to seem futile; they pursue, without zest, problems without solutions.

Of one of Miss Murray's sensitive heroines we read : " She knew that she never cared for anyone but herself ; she had discovered that some time ago. . . . Her new-found self-contempt was without limit," and of one of Miss Meynell's sensitive heroes, that " loving had released him from his unwilling, unhappy egoism." Egoism, unwilling and unhappy, is indeed the badge of all this tribe, and love is rarely a release. It is, of course, the privilege of intellectual youth to torture itself, and to regard the pain as more important than the fall of dynasties ; nor do I know of any arithmetic which will challenge that proportion. Another weakness of youth is for excess of beauty, goodness, and wit—and, above all, of sexual attraction. The rare sensibility of the characters in this sort of fiction would be warranted, if anything could warrant it, by their dazzling brilliance and awful loveliness. The weakness, I grant, is not confined to any school or sex. Miss Sinclair's geniuses abound like flies in summer, while for manly beauty and attractiveness I suppose we need look no further than the works of Ouida (with which I pretend no familiarity) or of Byron. But certainly the taste for these exceptional folk grows. And all the while such persons do not exist.

Miss Viola Meynell is distinguished by a gift for the broadly comic. Her girls who say: "Well, I don't know; I think people always like to do the things they're fond of doing," and "I put it down to the want of ignorance, don't you think so?" are adorable; and her elocution mistress might almost have come out of "Martin Chuzzlewit." After a female pupil's recital of Housman's "Bredon Hill," the mistress's criticism is:

> I notice that the reciter was speaking in the person of a man—that is, if I haven't mistaken. Many people prefer in a case like that just to change the words that denote the sex—"his" for "her," for instance, "groom" for "bride," and so on. This poem is certainly applicable to either sex. However, the reciter has evidently preferred to adhere rigorously to the text in this instance. I noticed an improvement in the phonation, and I think the voice grows much stronger.

Women novelists have, on the whole, I think, succeeded better in the satiric delineation of men's foibles than in the direct delineation of their virtues (witness Jane Austen). I do not want to suggest any generalisation to the effect that this always must be so. But certainly, among the women writers of the day, and not least in Miss Meynell's work, I am troubled by a feeling that the male characters

are too frequently relegated to a low moral level, a level of egoism and mere self-absorption. In " Columbine " the hero is amazingly self-centred : he sees everything as it affects his own personality, nothing objectively. In " Modern Lovers " the hero has faults to which one cannot help suspecting that his creator was either blind or over-indulgent. It is not in the least that one wants didacticism, vice denounced, or virtue embarrassed with laudation : all one wants is the recognition, *felt* in the texture of the representation, revealed through it, that there is something abnormal, unrepresentative, unpleasant, in these egoistic excesses. " Narcissus " deals with two brothers, Victor and Jimmy. The relationship between them is one of the best things about them. Miss Meynell exercises upon it her rare gift of stressing sentimental values without ever becoming in the bad sense sentimental. She has a wonderful touch for the deep and recondite pleasure of simple things : the spiritual atmosphere of a living-room, the reading of a book. The picture of the two boys, sitting in the library and reading question and answer out of one of those noble old-fashioned manuals of instruction, is a permanent possession :

Sometimes almost unconsciously Victor was able

to put some dissatisfaction into his tone, as if to imply that the replies were not altogether adequate.

"*Can you not give* one *familiar instance to explain the difference between M-m-mode and Substance?*" he asked, putting into his voice a scorn and emphasis of his own.

But the perfect composed reply came at once.

"*Yes. If we reflect on a round piece of wax, it is plain that wax is a thing which may subsist without the roundness.*"

The contrast is between Victor's eager hopes, painful humiliations, imaginative exaggerations of impulse and experience, on the one hand, and Jimmy's quiet, selfish, charming personality, always putting pain and realisation away from it, on the other. Victor in his restless questing, and Jimmy in his steady but ultimately ineffectual avoidances, both come up, in their love affairs, against something too strong for them. The relentlessness of sexual love—the way in which it sometimes seems to choose blindly, so that other ardours and passions, to say nothing of reasonablenesses, can only wreck themselves upon it—that, and the teaching of that, the power of strong inevitable things to mould the soul into acquiescence, are Miss Meynell's essential theme.

On one minor point in the plot I must comment, because it is typical of the school.

A girl is engaged to a man who tells her " something out of his past." Her revulsion is terrible : she says : " If I could only tell you how I hate you ! " Yet (1) he insists on marrying her ; (2) she consents to marry him, if *it can be at once*, though she does not in the least forgive him ; (3) having married him, she proceeds to torture him with her coldness and contempt. Why will novelists make ordinary people do these extraordinary things ?

Miss Ethel Sidgwick provides a more extreme instance of the same puzzle. Starting off with the well-named " Promise," she has gone, in the books which may be called the " Ingestre " series and the " Hatchways " series, further and further afield after a painful extravagance of subtlety. Her methods are violently indirect ; almost no device is neglected, one feels in bewilderment, for preventing the reader from understanding her. And, when one does disentangle what is supposed to have happened, it is often something that never could have happened. I emphasise this, because it seems to me indubitable that Miss Sidgwick has great gifts—that the light she is so industriously hiding under a bushel might, if she would but let it, shine clear and strong. Why does she do it ? Why, in particular, does she introduce

—not, it is true, as commanding heroes, but at any rate as pleasant ordinary youngsters—cads of the most fantastic description? They "kiss and tell," they violate confidences, they sneer and sulk and bully, and all this not by way of occasional misdemeanour, but in the routine of their curious lives. Now, pleasant ordinary youngsters are not like that, and surely Miss Sidgwick must herself suspect the fact. Yet she is not alone in her mishandling; several women writers have recently drawn cads without presenting them to our notice *as* cads. And so, I hasten to add, have several men. But Mrs. Lynd, both in her admirable novel, "The Chorus," and in her witty and moving short stories, "The Thrush and the Jay," has drawn cads and shown exactly what they were.

Miss Jones's "Inigo Sandys"—to choose her most representative work—aims so high that to accord it the praise which belongs to cheerful mediocrity would be an insult. Nobody who had not very considerable gifts and considerable knowledge could have written it: moreover, it is in one sense genuinely creative—it makes its own world. But what a world! Inigo is at Cambridge, and a brilliant and imposing young man called Charles desires and wins his friendship. But what worries Charles is that he loves

Inigo more than Inigo loves him ; and what worries Inigo is that he can't give Charles quite the complete and concentrated devotion which Charles demands ; and they are both so sensitive and so subtle that they are bound to make the greatest achievable mess of any emotional relationship. I am not sure what causes the final disruption. It is the drawback of Miss Jones's narrative method that one can never be sure of the connexion of anything with anything else. She usually begins in the middle, which on the face of it is the wrong place to begin. This is a favourite habit of contemporary authors, and in effect a lazy one, though of course laziness is not the motive : it illegitimately puts the trouble of supplying the narrative connexions upon the reader, when to supply them is the writer's business. And it makes continuous reading impossible ; one has always to be explaining the top of the page by something which is not apparent till one gets to the bottom. It may be said, Miss Jones could argue that the mere fact of one's going on reading under these difficulties is a tribute to the charm and grace of her style. And so it is. But one might as well argue that a jolting railway carriage is æsthetically justifiable because one endures it for the sake of going on with a

journey. And so back to Inigo and Charles. *Are* there such people? Friendship is no doubt an infinitely delicate thing, but it does not consist entirely of much ado about nothing. When Inigo gives up cricket because Charles might be jealous of it—is that sane? It is not sane. It is nonsensical. And if you ask me whether insanity may not be treated in a novel, I say yes—if it is treated *as* insanity. Which is just what Miss Jones doesn't do. So Inigo embarks upon his maturer relationships under the heavy disability of unreality. He falls in love with Jocelyn, of whom his dear friend Roddy says to him: "I bet you she believes in Absolute Beauty—no, that *may* be unjust. But anyway, she's damned Chelseaish." Again I am at sea. Do not most of us believe in Absolute Beauty? Is Plato relegated to Chelsea? Jocelyn refuses to go on being a wife to Inigo. Subsequently he falls in love with Henrietta, who is dying of consumption; and, when she does die, he suddenly, on the last page, in a burst of melodrama quite out of tune with the rest of the book, shoots himself. He might have had more consideration for the friends in whose house Henrietta has just died; and if one were to judge him as a human being, one would find this act inconsistent with his character. But no

such criteria can be applied here. It is a world of dream.

(II) The Egoism-Specialists

The artistic temperament consists of continually taking one's artistic temperature. It is the power that gives us the gift to see ourselves as we should like others to see us. It is poses, poses, all the way, with press cuttings mixed in one's path like mad. It gives pleasure for the sake of being considered pleasant, worships beauty for the sake of the company beauty keeps, and, instead of falling in love, arranges itself picturesquely in that emotion before giving the signal for the limelights. It is never in touch with reality, for it is too busy with realisation. It is a paradox, for it regards self from without while tormenting it from within : it is a platitude, for it re-asseverates the too-well-known. It is a form of lunacy, nourished on moonshine, and dependent on one's being beside oneself—one's own audience, one's own chorus, one's own critic, and yet desperately and humiliatingly concerned with the approval of others. It is the self-admiration which destroys self-respect. It is its own object and its own subject, its own *objet d'art* and its own *mauvais sujet*. Also, it has nothing in particular to do with art ; there

is nothing artistic about it except its name. We have all met people who had the temperament without any accompanying power of artistic expression or artistic appreciation whatever. Zella, in Miss Delafield's " Zella Sees Herself," is the pure type. She is not an artist, she has not the moral or intellectual equipment of the artist, but she has a quick cleverness and a ready responsiveness which enable her to deceive herself into the practice of the arts—and of the emotions. When she contemplates becoming a nun it is only because she " fancies herself " as a nun. When she begins to write a novel it is not because she wants to write a novel, but because she wants to find self-expression as a novelist. She morbidly craves approbation. She reflects others, lest they cast reflections on *her*. And yet she is not just a chameleon. Somewhere in her there is a *real* Zella, and at one important point in her life she sees herself, and knows what has been the matter all along. There the book stops. It begins when she is seven, and it leaves her after the first house-party her father (at the instigation of a " managing " aunt) gives for her benefit. The author is extremely witty in the satiric vein ; but there is much more to the book than that. There is sympathy as well as irony, illumination as well

as excoriation. We are made to feel Zella's pathos and charm, despite her maddening insincerity. A still more ironical and amusing study is that of Zella's Aunt Marianne, whose vast complacency and serene fatuity no reality can ever touch, so that the humour of her is uncomplicated by any hint of pathetic reserves. *Here* is an insincerity so complete, so four-square, so monumental, that Zella's insincerities have by comparison a sincerity of their own. Aunt Marianne, a " good woman," a " devoted wife," a " model mother "—any similar collection of catchwords would equally apply to her : I am quoting the phraseology of convention, not of Miss Delafield—has the lie in the soul. One of her stock assertions is that " gentlemen do not always quite understand " (gentlemen are here contrasted with ladies, not with men or women) ; one of her habits is always to talk of herself in the third person to children when they are unhappy (" Don't you remember the piece of poetry Aunt Marianne is so fond of ? "). She has a contemptuous horror of " foreigners," and refers blandly to " the Last Sacraments, such as they are, of the Roman Catholic Church." A characteristic remark of hers runs : " There was a second telegram, I believe, to say that she had passed away quite peacefully. Or, rather,

since foreigners word these things very oddly, it just said that she had died that morning." When she observes that " God is not mocked," Aunt Marianne's tones remind her hearer " of a showman exhibiting the strange peculiarities of his charge."

The amazing atmosphere of hysteria with which Miss Delafield credits Zella's convent-school provides further opportunities of the same satiric method. That method, however, is strangely relaxed in favour of an objectionable young man called James, Zella's cousin, in whom the one virtue of sincerity is apparently intended to cover a multitude of priggish and self-assertive traits. He solemnly warns Zella against reading Kant and Hegel, because, he says, " I hate girls to have a smattering of that sort of thing ; and for those who read in earnest it's worse still." Not that all the men escape. There is a marvellous young man—large, handsome, " well connected "—who woos Zella, with appalling verisimilitude, in sentences such as : " I lost something on the moors up there, though, that I shall never find again—perhaps it was my youth."

Miss Dane's first and most individual book, " Regiment of Women," came out almost simultaneously with Miss Delafield's " Zella," and

had much the same kind of success. But whereas Miss Delafield has persevered in studies of the same type as her first, Miss Dane has tried experiments further afield. It will be sufficient to discuss her earliest and latest.

The title "Regiment of Women," reminds me, by a simple connexion, of John Knox; and from him my thought passes on to Sir Walter Scott, who, in one of the notes to "Old Mortality," tells an anecdote in which an old lady contrasts "Knox deaving us a' with his clavers" and "Claver'se deaving us a' with his knocks." We do not, I fear, read Scott any longer as fervently as we used, and ought. Our spirits are too weak; "Old Mortality" weighs heavily on us like unwilling sleep. We tend in our fiction to substitute the special case for the universal interest. The new method prevails upon the old: if I may so phrase it, the Danes are driving out the Scotts. For Miss Dane provides a special case of our affection for the special case. She concentrates on a corner of life, and finds in it the modes and instruments of pity and terror—love, jealousy, ambition, loss, despair and death. Her first novel was written with an assured ease, a skilful disposition and concentration of force, that seemed to suggest either long practice or astonishing ability. (I

do not mean, of course, that practice will ever do instead of ability : all I mean is that a certain ability will sometimes, within its own limits, achieve by labour that effect of competence which a different ability achieves by grace. Genius is an infinite capacity for not having to take pains.)

I conceive Miss Dane to mean her title in almost its strict sense. Her subject is a girls' school, and the relation of mistress to pupil : rather, the relations between one particular mistress on the one side and a younger mistress and various pupils on the other. There is obviously here some question of " rule," of " regiment " : the relation cannot be one of equality. But the real theme of the book is the *emotional* control which a woman of brains and charm can exercise over her juniors. School-girl adoration, often amounting to a blind, ecstatic worship, is a very common fact, but I do not remember to have seen it at all fully or faithfully dealt with in fiction—certainly I know of no previous book so largely concerned with it. The important thing to realise about it—as indeed about all the emotions of childhood, which are far more painfully intense, more real, more formative of character, than some grown-ups appear to remember—is the responsibility

it puts upon the grown-ups who have to do with it.

I do not know which to admire more, Miss Dane's delicacy of perception or her courageousness of approach. She handles difficulties with extraordinary ease. One of her schoolgirls, Louise, is a child of "temperament" and brains, unhappy, introspective, passionate—the sort of child whom placidity and denseness write off as "morbid." Miss Dane realises and presents her most vividly, most convincingly, without a touch of exaggeration. Not less difficult is the main character, Clare Hartill, the mistress whose restless craving for emotional satisfaction and the exercise of power leads her into the cruelty of exploiting, and then deriding, the eager affection she knows how to evoke. The way in which the psychological springs of her action are revealed, while all the time we are made to understand how she is able to conceal them from herself, is thorough and powerful. One of her victims is a junior mistress, a healthy, jolly, amiable young woman, not too bright and good to feel and show a fair amount of selfishness and temper. This girl is rescued by the luck which throws in her path a man with whom she falls in love. He is the only man to play any considerable part in the book, and he is less

real—far less real—than the women. But the love-affair is in a sense incidental, though the plot is designed to lead up to it. The characters who stand out unforgettably are Clare and Louise. The violence of suffering which culminates in Louise's suicide, the pitilessness with which Clare is forced to face her own motives and realise her own failure, are rendered with the restraint of true tragedy.

The egoism of childhood is too natural to be unbeautiful ; and Miss Dane was able to give this early study of hers the excuse of beauty. Nor has she lost touch with the beautiful as she has pushed her later researches into less grateful places ; but a certain violence of indirectness, a straining after effectiveness, has made itself felt. It marred " Legend," which contained a good idea ; and " Wandering Stars " is odd, wilful and far-fetched. The book consists of two stories, and the first reappears in the second as the plot of a play written by one of the characters in that second ! Talk of misplaced ingenuity ! And the pity of it is that the first story, whose first-hand quality is thus gratuitously destroyed for us, is beautiful, whereas the second is artificial, unconvincing, incoherent, inconclusive, strained, affected and pretentious. How anybody who could write " The Lover "

could bring or allow herself to write " Wandering Stars " is a mystery beyond probing. " The Lover " deals with the loss and recapture of love in married life ; it uses an entirely new and most realistic kind of ghost ; and the ghost is not just apparatus but the core of the plot. This little tale of less than a hundred pages is, in its way, not far short of perfect. As for " Wandering Stars "—but I have said enough about that. The difference shows how little even the cleverest can do by taking thought. " The Lover " seems inspired, and the people in it are comparatively simple—by which I do not mean unsubtle ; but in " Wandering Stars " there is the attempt to penetrate and reveal egoisms accentuated to absurdity, and the people are impossible.

(III) Of the Earth Earthy

I cannot abide the country, except as a place to live in. The conventionalised country of most novelists consists so largely of sweat, manure, mortgages, illegitimate and unwanted babies and flagellant farmers with horsewhips, that I find it almost impossible to read about : it afflicts me with an apathy bordering upon delirium. I could even prefer the Phyllises and Phyllidas, the floutings and poutings, the bowers

and flowers, of the opposite convention : they are just as rural and just as real, and not anything like so depressing. But there is no help for these things : local colour is a yellowish grey.

Of course, if one looks at the " earthy " fiction as it is given us by a writer of genius like Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, the indictment will not hold : there are rebuttals of it to be found in a thousand subtleties and splendours. But all the same, as a general impression, it reasserts itself : there *is*, even in Miss Kaye-Smith's work, an occasional heaviness, a sense of formality and convention, as if she had chosen the soil for her theme instead of being chosen by it. " Joanna Godden," it is true, could scarcely be over-praised. There, the rich strong life of the countryside seems to find its own inevitable expression. Joanna herself lives in memory, embodying, like all the great characters in fiction, a universal power : in her we feel the strength and weakness, the primitive ardour and unrelenting tragedy, of the very earth. But is Miss Kaye-Smith's preoccupation with the earth always so spontaneous ? There is an effect of limitation in some of her work ; nor do I mean that she is too fond of Sussex ! Even if one could be that, special boundaries are

nothing ; you can be bounded in a nutshell and count yourself king of infinite space—if your dreams are good enough. Rather it is the being bounded within a type of subject. Consider the influence of the boundaries on Miss Kaye-Smith's novel of war-time, " Little England " —the symbolism of her title may be taken as complementary to the symbolism of Mr. Kipling's sensible question : " What do they know of England who only England know ? " You can know a thing by comparison with other things outside it (the Kipling method) : or you can know a thing by intensive study of itself (the Kaye-Smith method). One might rewrite Mr. Kipling's line : " What do they know of England who only Sussex know ? " Mr. Hilaire Belloc would presumably reply : " Everything "—and after reading Miss Kaye-Smith one might be tempted to agree with him. For, after all, there is, in actual result, no difference between the two methods, the comparative and the intensive : each succeeds in so far, and only in so far, as it universalises the interest of its particular subject. This universality is the test of art. Of Miss Kaye-Smith's Sussex story one does not ask : " Is it true to Sussex ? "—but : " Is it true to life ? " The latter includes the former, the greater the less. One cannot master

a fact in its innermost implications without implicitly comparing it with the rest of experience : one cannot " place " it comparatively without understanding its essence. Some rustic sage has observed that " human nature is human nature all the world over " ; and the test of " Little England " is its relevance to the problems of all England, and of the world. The only trouble is that it does not emerge triumphant from the test. It is limited, not by geography, but by kind, though its attempt to sound the profundities of simple inarticulate natures is ambitious—as ambitious as would be the attempt to dissect natures the most complex and recondite. Indeed, these plain country folk are perhaps recondite in the literal sense : their reserve is more baffling than the mere complexity of civilisation. Miss Kaye-Smith's types include the straightforward young farmer, puzzled, unwilling to go to the war yet acquiescent in the compulsion which takes him to it—and ultimately a convert to patriotic enthusiasm : his younger brother, who fights the battle of the soil, wringing food from the reluctant earth ; their sisters, the primitive, hoydenish flirt and the over-sensitive, the " refined," teacher : their argumentative and alcoholic father, and their ambiguous and incoherent mother. Outside

this one family I think the characterisation is less sure, and some of the more melodramatic incidents are unconvincing. But indubitably, in her " big scenes," Miss Kaye-Smith rises to the height of tragedy : she has understanding, sincerity and power. Indeed, she has creative genius, which, great itself, may always achieve new greatness. Yet in the recent " The End of the House of Alard " there is, save for one character, disappointment rather than any fresh promise. It is less good than " Joanna Godden," because it is lopped into an artificial pattern, not created naturally as the characters live and grow. Miss Kaye-Smith is out to prove something, and something purely external, temporal, accidental—that the old landed estates must break up, that the day of the old squires is over. It may be so, or it may not. To prove it, the eldest son is killed in the war, the second son gives up the girl he loves in order to marry money and consequently shoots himself, the third son dies of heart disease, the fourth and last son adopts the life of religious retreat ; one daughter is divorced, another remains unmarried, a third marries outside the circle of " county families." A clean sweep ! But how formal, how unconvincing, how pointless ! And surely it is possible to make a man religious

without making him a prig, and to make him a prig without making him a bounder? Still, the book is admirably written and deeply interesting, and Stella, the girl who is loved but deserted, is true and rich in every moment—a character of pure beauty and light. The promise is hers.

What Sussex is to Miss Kaye-Smith, Cornwall is to Miss Tennyson Jesse. Most of the stories in her "Beggars on Horseback" have a Cornish setting; and the merits of those early short stories are rivalled, if not outstripped, in her long novel "Secret Bread." In "Beggars on Horseback" there are eight stories, arranged, as a footnote tells us, in chronological order: it is at once a pity, and a tribute to the development of an artist, that that order puts the least good story first and the best last. In several places there is a suggestion of the mystic, the miraculous, the other-worldly: only twice is it made definite, and then it is least convincing. On the whole, the effects depend on a large sureness and wisdom which underlie them: they are not strained after, or painfully fashioned, or hardly captured: they seem the easy and inevitable products, almost the by-products, of creative power. There are two kinds of good narrative—the kind which dazzles or impresses by some

sudden brilliance of plot, picture, characterisation, style ; and the kind which achieves unity and force by simply inexplicably being what it is, so that you cannot lay a finger on this or that special merit and say : " Here is the point : here is the explanation." Of these two kinds the latter is the better ; and to it " Beggars on Horseback " belongs.

" Secret Bread " is on the grand scale : it aims at being a masterpiece. If it does not succeed in being that—and I do not think it does—there has yet gone to the making of it so much thought, insight and knowledge, so much feeling for essentials, so much appreciation of beauty, so much patience and skill, that it fails only through a certain structural weakness and, so to say, dilatoriness in description. It is too long, but that is a fault on the right side. Its riches are poured out in abundance and they do not cohere ; but that is better than nice adjustment of stinted goods. And, besides, we are probably every year—as the output of books gets more and more beyond enumeration or imagination—more and more inclined to regard " too long " as a too severe stricture. After all, many of the best books are in one sense too long. Many of Dickens's novels, many of Thackeray's, would be artistically the better for a little " pull-

ing together." But the public for which Dickens and Thackeray wrote *liked* what we nowadays call padding. It was in no such feverish hurry to concentrate: it preferred to linger and to gossip. Miss Tennyson Jesse's conception is on the epic scale, and needs space—needs even, if the paradox is permissible, excess of space—for its working out. People with leisure to enjoy it will probably not find it too long at all. There is a great deal of scenery, but it is all *seen*; always the landscape is correlated with the human emotion which makes it and is made by it, there are never mere patches of fine writing stuck on to the outside of the story. And there is a plot. Sometimes the narrative seems to wander away from the plot, as if the structure were forgotten in the details; but generally we are made to realise afterwards that the structure has been, even in apparent irrelevancies, observed. Most of the action passes in Cornwall; the background of the big world is not forgotten.

Indeed it is in this sense of proportion that Miss Tennyson Jesse's creation is most like real life—in the way that hours, or moments, stand out; that incidents fix themselves in the memory, and recur; that the experience of years seems to shrink or expand in relation to the ardour or lassitude of a day; while still,

ceaseless, relevant, trivial or momentous, the wash and surge of the outer, the public, life, the life that is not intimately *ourselves*, goes on. To get this proportion in so large a work—to adjust the social circumstances to the private lives—is an impressive intellectual feat. Miss Tennyson Jesse brings intellectual power as well as creative imagination (I know that the two things cannot be so crudely distinguished, but the rough distinction will suffice for my meaning) to her work.

We are taken through two whole generations, from just before the birth of Ishmael Ruan up to the time of his death as an old man—past the Crimean War, the Mutiny, the South African War, nearly to the present day. Ishmael is legitimate—by a few hours ; his elder brothers and sister are not. Hence he inherits the estate of Cloom which his eldest brother, Archelaus, holds should rightly belong to himself ; and, all through, we feel the malignancy of Archelaus bringing tragedy or the threat or hint of tragedy into the lives of his fellows. Ishmael himself is, to me at any rate, never quite real. His moments, his emotions, are ; only they are general rather than particular. They are the moments and emotions of the human soul rather than of Ishmael. Archelaus, on

the other hand, with his queer cunning cruelty —a sort of throw-back to an animal ancestry —is highly individual and impressive. Some of the episodes in which he figures have that strange intensity which made Miss Tennyson Jesse's short stories so memorable. There is something painful and terrible in her genius. She is preoccupied with pain—not morbidly, but as the finely sensitive must be pre-occupied with it in this world of pain. And, because the size of her plan takes in many partings and deaths, we get the same effect here as in life, of a drift that goes and goes into the past while yet something strangely persists. The persistent thing in "Secret Bread" is Ishmael's feeling for the estate of Cloom, for the land that is his. I must content myself with bare mention of his relations with women, his earnest and difficult chastity, his disappoint-ment, his first marriage of physical passion and his second of subdued and regulated love; and, for quotation, I choose what is in more than one sense the central passage—the occasion on which Ishmael realises, or thinks he realises, that he is to have a son to carry on his work and inherit his home:

> All the beauties of Cloom, of life, all the trouble his own short span had felt, all the future held,

seemed to fall into place and be made worth while. This was what he had lived for without knowing it—not to make Cloom finer for himself, not to save his own soul or carve out a life for himself, but this—to make of himself this mysterious immortality. Always he had waited for " something " to happen, always at moments of keenest pleasure he had been conscious there was more he did not feel : depths unplumbed, heights unscaled, some master-rapture that would explain all the others and that he never came upon. Even beauty had had this sting for him ; he had always felt that, however lovely a thing were, there was something more beautiful just round the corner, for ever slipping ahead, like a star reflected in a rain-filled rut. Now for the first time he was aware of a dizzying sensation as though for one moment the gleam had stayed still, as if Beauty for a flash were not withdrawing herself, as though time for one moment stood, and that moment was self-sufficient, free of the perpetual something that was always just ahead ; more, actually capturing that something. The moment had the quality of immortality, although it reeled and was caught up again in the inexorable march, but, drunken with it, he stayed tingling in the cold dawn.

Such a passage can tell us how and where Miss Tennyson Jesse's story of the generations differs from others that we have discussed elsewhere : Mrs. Kean Seymour's, for instance, or Miss Rose Macaulay's. It has its roots in a plot of earth.

(IV) Casual Flowers

Classification is both a rhythm and a decorum; but it inevitably does injustice to the unclassifiable, and these may be the best. Many of the acutest critics of this generation would insist that the best of the younger novelists is Mr. E. M. Forster: many would pay that tribute to Miss Virginia Woolf: many to Miss Romer Wilson: and certainly not a few to "Henry Handel Richardson." Yet not one of these could be bound up with others in a group: in each the strangeness, the uniqueness of tone, is at once the mark of greatness and the mark of isolation. And there are others, of less pretensions, but still considerable. In considering these solitaries, then, we must have regard primarily to the main achievement of each (and several of them, so far, are writers of one achievement apiece); but also we must bear in mind their relation to broader tendencies, for diversity is itself a relation. There is, in some cases, a *straining away*—not necessarily an intentional or even a conscious one, but still an effort to escape and to be lonely: in others, there is the genuine ease of loneliness, the effortlessness of adequacy.

I have spoken earlier, and in a different

connection, of " Henry Handel Richardson's " school-story ; here I am concerned with her as the author of " Maurice Guest," a book unique in kind and yet of great influence. Nobody ever has succeeded, and nobody ever will succeed, in writing another book at all like it ; and I do not know that it ever attained much general fame ; but it has been widely read among writers, and the patient thoroughness of its technique has certainly served for an example and a standard. The most striking thing about it is its combination of traditional objectivity in treatment—what one may call its " old masterliness "—with " modernity " of theme. For it is mainly concerned with neurosis carried over into definite mental disease. It deals with musical aspirants and musical geniuses in a German town ; its story is of a love affair so odd, so ugly, so insane, that to read it is like nightmare ; yet never at any point does it resemble the stories of neurotic love to which the fashion of the moment has since accustomed us.

It is probably no more than a coincidence that Miss Romer Wilson made her fame with a book whose subject is musical genius and whose scene is Germany. " Martin Schüler," as a first book, promised greatness ; but it did

more : it achieved greatness. It is in itself sufficient to explain why Miss Wilson is so widely held to have shown a purer genius than any of her contemporaries. She writes with a spontaneous and vatic force ; apparently she cannot help herself, which is the best excuse for writing. There is in " Martin Schüler " a wild, melancholy and inescapable grandeur. I cannot think that the success is repeated in " The Death of Society," which received more notice and praise. There are lovely bits of writing in that book, but the plot hovers rather absurdly between realism and symbolism ; one cannot be moved by the characters or incidents, which have not even the reality of their own strange world ; there is no artistic coherence. And " The Grand Tour," in which Miss Wilson attempts to repeat her triumphant presentation of genius, does indeed succeed in presenting genius, but does it so scrappily that the total effect is merely dull.

It is, of course, a favourite device of authors to engage your interest by assuring you that their heroes are persons of high literary achievement. The trouble is that they are so seldom in a position to prove it. Meredith could afford to tell us that his Diana was witty : he was ready with the witticisms. An apparently

easier course is taken by those who make their heroes composers or sculptors : we can scarcely ask for the scores or the marbles. But then, in the absence of score and marble, how are we to be sure of the greatness ? It is Miss Wilson's special gift that she can make us sure. Martin Schüler, in her first book, was a musician. The writer of the letters which make up " The Grand Tour " is a sculptor. You could never doubt that Martin was a great musician, and the new hero is equally adequate. He is famous, young, vital, but he is not very interesting. Why, after all, should he be ? It is a commonplace that those who can express themselves sublimely in one medium are often stutteringly incoherent in another : we are no whit less convinced of the sculpture because we are bored by the letters. They tell of moods, of mild social experiences—a dinner, a flirtation, a country holiday : thin stuff. They work up to an attempt to express a philosophy of life, but that is presumably what the supposed writer has expressed in other ways : he has little to tell us in words. Sometimes, indeed, he breaks out with a magnificent phrase, as when he writes of one of his sitters surveying a portrait-statue : " Were those white, silent curves himself ? Was that ample block

of snow Hyacinthe Simon? Perhaps. He had sat in a chair and the snow of time had drifted over him." Indeed, there is frequent richness, brilliance, charm; but it is all scattered, casual, careless. It does not make a *book*.

Another young woman writer who achieved —and deserved—sudden fame with a first book is Mrs. Naomi Mitchison, whose "The Conquered" is an historical novel of a new kind. I cannot, in the ordinary way, abide historical novels. The difficulties they encounter are so great as to seem at first sight insurmountable; for either the whole thing, language, manners, motives, must be so modernised as to make us wonder why the antique setting is there at all, or else the historical apparatus will creak and lumber, baffling us with a multitude of "zooks" and "zounds"—or their remoter equivalents. And what, after all, can we know about the way in which men felt so long ago—Cavaliers or Crusaders or Romans? But the answer to that is another question. What can we know about the way in which men feel now? The dust of modernity is as thick as the drift of the ages—the only difference is that it has not settled: and still "we mortal millions live alone." Every narrative is creation, because

understanding is itself a creative act; the strictest history is born dead unless it burns and breathes with imagination from within; if the past *is* only because it *was*, moment by moment that becomes true of the present also; realism and romance are not two different things; the test of any story, scientific, poetic, ancient, modern or futurist, is simply that it convinces.

Mrs. Mitchison brings Cæsar on her stage, and gives one the feeling of that bleak and terrible greatness. The impression which Cæsar has left on history is just the impression he made on his contemporaries. The shadow of a vastness had fallen coldly across them. Mrs. Mitchison knows how to make it fall across *us*. She has, as it were by miracle, got back into the air and mood of the time she writes about: she creates, and recreates. The splendour and the mystery come easy to her. She is at home. It never occurs to one, in reading, to doubt that just so did things happen. And this holds of motive no less than of externals. Nothing could be more difficult than for the sophisticated twentieth-century mind to enter into the simplicity of the barbarian Gaul—except, perhaps, for it to enter into the different sophistication of the cultivated Roman; but Mrs.

Mitchison's touch never falters. She never condescends to the pedantry of archaic speech on the one hand or of distracting colloquialism on the other. And she rises without effort to eloquence and, beyond eloquence, to poetry.

" The Orissers " is a remarkable book, by a remarkable man. I know nothing of Mr. Myers save as the author of this one volume, but I am convinced that, if he had published only the casual aphorisms scattered—or rather heaped up—throughout his story, he would have established his reputation as a thinker of startling subtlety and originality. The book is like no other. It is so far removed from all conventions that " original " sounds a mild word for it : it is extraordinary. If Mr. Myers reminds one of anybody in his theme, it is of the Brontës ; but he reminds one of nobody in his technique. Where does he place his people ? In the English countryside—but with what a difference ! No soil overworked by serial crops will serve *his* purpose : he must have his own local colour : he must have his own locality. After a few preliminary glimpses at such comparatively familiar haunts as Egypt and Morocco, we are transported to Eamor, the family place of the Orissers : there is a large town, not far away, called Tornel, scarcely less sinister and

remote, but it is actually at Eamor itself that the conflict rages. Conflict? Between what? It is hard to say, for everything moves, in these more than five hundred pages, under the surface: motive is chased and tortured through every by-way and subterranean recess of personality: and even when emotion and calculation break out into violent action, the action seems pale beside the reasons for it. Thus, one young man, no more and no less the "hero" of the book than two or three others—though he marries the unquestionable "heroine"—casually commits a murder in order to secure that heroine in the possession of the property; but the murder is scarcely noticeable, it is so completely taken for granted by the murderer and his lady. The property in dispute is more than property: it is a symbol. The conflict is of ideas. Mr. Myers refers somewhere to "an odious exchange of intuitions, a ridiculous tussle of wills": so might the whole be summed up. The Orissers and their friends are, in the view of their opponents, "dedicated by some inherent vice of nature to an everlasting contumacy": to the Orissers, the Maynes and *their* friends, who represent the common order of mankind, yet appear as "monstrosities," "beings outside the ordinary run of humanity."

Nicholas Orisser (who lives "on the higher cerebral levels of the mind," believes in the mind's "holiness," and despises the people who go straight ahead with material experience instead of abstracting themselves from it into a timeless world) has a love-affair: we are told that "up to this time his amours had been venal in all but two cases." He is about twenty! I have sometimes tried to defend the Victorians from the charge of having been merely mealy-mouthed inventors of harmonies; but really, by this standard, they appear positively—Victorian.

The most striking character is Madeline Mayne. "The sheer violence of Madeline's insincerity almost turned it into its opposite." Driven by malignant hate, she believes utterly that all she desires is a reciprocity of love. The subtlety and fullness of this study are extraordinary: Madeline may reasonably be compared to Meredith's Egoist and the Valerie Upton of Miss Sedgwick.

Whether the book is, or will ever be, very widely popular, I do not feel sure. Its enormous length—though every episode subserves the main theme—may be an obstacle to some, its richness of style and thought to others. Most of all, perhaps, its unreality, its remote-

ness from anything that we ordinary people are conscious of experiencing, its urgent and threatening symbolism, will baffle and perplex. But its exactness and profundity of thought give it permanence. It is a work conceived and executed on the grand scale, and it will live.

By comparison, Mr. Norman Douglas, who deals also with fantastic obscurity of motive, is almost conventional; for in him we can discern origins. He is, in "South Wind," concerned with the humours rather than the sombreness of eccentricity. He has a real and surprising wit. Its only defect is that it is all on one note. The book is a long one, and throughout it the sentences have the same turn and fall. For the first hundred pages or so one is dazzled; then amusement begins to turn into amazement. Instead of enjoying, the reader begins to ask how the note can be so long sustained, and, after that, it is possible that the reader may even become bored. But how rarely does one find it possible to blame a book for containing too many jests! The wit is original in kind; one cannot label it without libelling it; one cannot compare it to anybody else's wit—and yet it has a strangely familiar sound. It *is* of a type, but what type? No obvious parallel suggests itself. Mr. Douglas

himself, however, supplies the clue when he gives long extracts from an imaginary work, "Antiquities of Nepenthe," by an imaginary Monsignor Perrelli. The "Antiquities," of course, were in Latin—"Here was Latin worth reading; rich, sinewy, idiomatic, full of flavour, masculine"—but it is the English translation that we are given. Even in the translation the note is unmistakable. We have all found it in old works—I do not mean very old works, classical works, but works, say, of the Middle Ages, or of the later centuries in which people were still found to live and grub and have their being in "antiquities" that seem a little comical, a little incongruous to us. Such works are not necessarily written in Latin. Burton's "Anatomy" is one of them—the most famous of them. It is impossible to read a page of Burton without getting what seems, to our more modern sense, an impression of comicality quite other than the author's own rich, partially whimsical, intention. He sounds to us richer than he can have sounded to his contemporaries, whimsical in a way which could not possibly have been within contemporary appreciation. And in this I mean no disrespect to Burton's own intention and genius and appreciation of himself. On the contrary, it is a

singular mark of genius that a book should compel succeeding centuries to enrich it. Only, what the centuries have done for the "Anatomy," Mr. Douglas has done for the "Antiquities."

The exquisite suitability of the "Antiquities" in their setting is an indication of where we have to look for Mr. Douglas's school. He is a scholar. His range of learning is wide, his handling of his knowledge is easy. His descriptions, for instance, of the medical properties inherent in certain springs might have come word for long fantastic word out of some old, old treatise; they have the same beautiful, tortuous verbosity, they have the same startling irrelevance and outspokenness, and they are full of terms which one does not understand. The only simple one in the list is this (a characteristic abruptness): "The Fountain of Saint Feto had, by virtue of its smell alone, applied to her nose as she lay in her coffin, raised from the dead a certain Anna da Pasto." And now I am on a further trail. This scholarship, this cynicism, this artful-artless impropriety, this air of constantly handing you the devastatingly unexpected as if it were the inevitable comment upon life—surely the analogy is Anatole France? Not, of course, that I am suggesting a comparison in quality of genius. That would be

absurd. But the method, the manner, is like. And by distinguishing where the *unlikeness* comes one can, I think, arrive at a valuable criticism of Mr. Douglas.

Granted all that everyone has said a thousand times about the cynicism, the scepticism, of Anatole France, his work is, like all great art, a reading of life, an interpretation. His wit is no more merely destructive than Voltaire's or Swift's. The central fact, that there is greatness in things, shines through his demonstration of how little our greatnesses are. By a law of thought, scepticism can never be fundamental; the deeper it goes the more it changes to belief. Now, Mr. Douglas's book is not great art, nor anything like great art. Its scepticism is complete, because it is superficial. The fundamentals are not so much doubted as ignored. Consequently—and this is an aspect of Mr. Douglas's style that cannot be neglected—the cynicism will by many people be found decidedly unpleasant. The light handling of things usually held sacred will to some seem not wholly without offence. If it be retorted that the same is true of Anatole France, I can only insist that Anatole France's light handling is, properly understood, not light handling in *that* sense of the word "light." The cook who

makes the lightest pastry is not the cook who takes pastry-making lightly.

Mr. Douglas has a theme which offers unique attractions. He writes of the island of Nepenthe, a little place in the South Mediterranean, where are collected the strangest crowd of seekers after pleasure, seekers after knowledge, and social refugees. One of the few characters in the book who can be enjoyed without any painful reservation is a Russian, of hideous past, who claims to be the Messiah, and, having been expelled from his native land, has brought to Nepenthe his flock of "Little White Cows"—as the disciples are called. "Asked why he chose this title, he answered that cows were pure and useful animals without which humanity could not live; even so were his disciples. The innate good sense of this speech increased his reputation." At one point in his career the Messiah is the *protégé* of the Procurator of the Holy Synod, who "hoped, by placing him under an obligation, to fashion out of the young reformer an amenable instrument—a miscalculation which he lived (though not for long) to repent."

I am not of those who think that, in "They Went," Mr. Douglas has repeated the success of "South Wind."

Nor am I of those who can whole-heartedly enjoy Mr. Ronald Firbank, an author whose themes, whose scholarship, whose fantasy, suggest some affinity with Mr. Douglas. I cannot think his wit in the same class, but then I often cannot even guess at what he is talking about: I instance him here, less on his literary merits than as an example of how far eccentricity can be carried. Take his typical "Inclinations."

Let me present, as a perfectly serious and sincere criticism of it, the following brief but memorable passage from "Martin Chuzzlewit":

> "To be presented to a Pogram," said Miss Codger, "by a Hominy, indeed, a thrilling moment is it in its impressiveness on what we call our feelings. But why we call them so, or why impressed they are, or if impressed they are at all, or if at all we are, or if there really is, O gasping one! a Pogram or a Hominy, or any active principle to which we give those titles, is a topic, spirit-searching, light-abandoned, much too vast to enter on at this unlooked-for crisis."
>
> "Mind and matter," said the lady in the wig, "glide swift into the vortex of immensity. Howls the sublime, and softly sleeps the calm Ideal, in the whispering chambers of Imagination. To hear it, sweet it is. But then, outlaughs the stern philosopher, and saith to the Grotesque, 'What

ho ! arrest for me that Agency. Go, bring it here ! ' And so the vision fadeth."

But that the two Literary Ladies (or L.L.'s) were unsuccessfully trying to be sublime, and Mr. Firbank is conceivably trying to be ridiculous, the former would supply, O gasping one ! not merely a commentary, but a parallel, for the latter. An incoherence like that of the L.L.'s now storms, now meanders, through " Inclinations." I cannot deny that the result is in a way amusing, I know not how intentionally so. I cannot help thinking that there is the germ of real wit in the following account, given by a woman who has thoughtlessly left her husband behind in Italy, of the tiringness of what she calls " domesticity " :

" Every time I enter the nursery now it's a strain. To-day was the climax. I've had many years' experience, Mrs. Occles said to me, as a nurse, and I'll have no meddling. Very well, I said to her, you can go ! O, good gracious ! Then at the door dear I turned back and I added Am I the child's mother or are you ? That ! she said ! is no affair of mine ! But as a rule I'm accustomed to see the Father ! ! What do you mean by the father ? I said ! But she wouldn't say."

Miss Dawkins passed her parasol beneath the bed.

" My button boots—— ! "

> " A child has so many little wants nurse I said. . . . It should have proper attention. . . . *I* know what a child wants, she said (so rudely), and when it wants it . . ."

I cannot say why I laughed when I read that —it was not only at the punctuation. (Why " Inclinations," by the way ? Why not " Exclamations " ?) But Mr. Firbank sinks to the level of my comprehension as seldom as Shadwell deviated into sense. When he does, if one cannot say to the moment with Faust, " Stay, thou art so fair ! " one at least, with the lady in the wig, " saith to the Grotesque, ' What ho ! arrest for me that Agency. Go, bring it here ! ' And so the vision fadeth."

Lest I should be suspected of exaggerating, I give—*verbatim*—Chapter XX :

> Mabel ! Mabel ! Mabel ! Mabel ! Mabel ! Mabel ! Mabel ! Mabel !

Here, from a longer chapter, is a typical description of scenery :

> Beneath her a landscape all humming with little trees stretched away towards such delicate, merest hills.

Here is a dinner-party (to impart such intelligibility to it as I can, I ought to explain that Miss Dawkins is supposed to be searching the world over for her parents) :

The " intimate " dinner arranged by Mrs. Collins in honour of her daughter also proved to be a large one.

A dinner of twenty at a table to hold eighteen.

As course succeeded course came the recurring pressure of a forward footman's knee.

Half asleep holding a shell-shaped spoon Miss Dawkins explored a sauce-boat as though it had been an Orient liner.

" Yes Mr. Collins."

" No Mr. Collins."

" Aha Mr. Collins."

" (*Thanks !*) "

" Yes, God is Love, Mr. Collins, and I'm sure they couldn't help it ! " she said at last.

" *Già, Già !* " the Countess struck in allegro across a bank of flowers.

" Well, here's health, Old Girl. The very best ! "

" And success to you . . . and may the Gods permit you to find them ! "

" If you ask me, I think it silly to find people," the Countess' former inamorato declared. " I don't want to find anybody ! . . ."

" No doubt you've tried clairvoyance ? " the member for Bovon asked.

" Indeed. And Palmistry, and Phrenology, and Cards, and Sand . . ."

" Well ? "

" O well . . . ," Miss Dawkins said, " I was warned I'd marry a septuagenarian within the forbidden degrees and never know it ! . . . Helios, Mene, Tetragrammaton ! "

"Have you looked by the Rhine at all?"

"Where haven't I?"

"Courage!" the Countess crooned.

"I've a presentiment they're in India. Somehow I connect my mother's fair hair with Bombay . . ."

Mr. Collins raised his glass.

"Then here's to Bombay!"

"Oh, nectar, Mr. Collins! Show me the cork —I always like to see the cork——! And my dear father was like me there. The cork, Ola, he'd say. A bottle of wine is nothing without the cork."

The only sentence in the whole book which seems to me absolutely clear and convincing occurs on page 101 and runs: "It's extraordinary Gerald doesn't go dotty." Well, a very little more of writing about Ronald . . .

One comes back, from such excursions, to a more ordinary art, with a sensation of having tried the wrong turning. Not *that* way, surely, can new avenues of artistic self-expression be discovered. Nor, I think, along the gloomy country places described by Mr. Powys in "The Left Leg" and "Black Bryony." To him the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts which it is almost a euphemism to call melancholy. He appears to start from the assumption that almost everything is nasty; lust, greed, lies are his constant theme, and if

he introduces goodness he tends to mitigate it with imbecility. His attitude can best be illustrated by the casual assumption of what is likely to give the human animal pleasure :

> The bird fluttered upon the ground in agony ; it had been hit everywhere by the little, piercing, wounding shots.
>
> Mr. Morsay and Mr. Told watched the seagull flopping about and soiling its splendid wings with the clay sod.
>
> " Another of them flying birds," was Mr. Told's comment.
>
> The Clerk was pleased, too, and began to feel better.

There is surely something a little cheap about this sort of cynicism. The corruption of man's heart is a fact, but it is not the main fact. Mr. Powys has humour, imagination, and narrative skill. But what is wrong with his method can be tested by a very simple comparison. Children playing inspire him to remark : " Where the children played the gentle summer air was filled with ugly, unseemly words." They inspired Blake to say :

When the voices of children are heard on the green,
  And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast,
  And everything else is still.

It is true that they also inspired him, in a different mood, to say :

Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down,
And the dews of night arise ;
Your spring and your day are wasted in play,
And your winter and night in disguise.

But the point is that what Blake says, in either mood, is *the* truth, while what Mr. Powys says is only *a* truth. It is the difference between art and theory.

Mr. David Garnett, whose subjects are externally more fantastic, is much nearer to the simple truth of emotion and belief.

Every English country gentleman has, of course, pondered long and seriously what he would do if his wife turned into a fox. Few, however, have been called upon to put their conclusions into practice. To Mr. Tebrick, whose story Mr. David Garnett has told with admirable reticence, the shock came unexpectedly. " The sudden changing of Mrs. Tebrick into a vixen," says Mr. Garnett, " is an established fact." He is not to be drawn aside into speculation on the possible explanations. He has a horror of second-hand or ill-supported embroideries upon the bare and certain story. What, then, are we to say about convincingness ? To some narrow folk, Mr. Garnett's

story, despite its sober veracity, will seem improbable; but not to those susceptible to the charms of style. From beginning to end of "Lady into Fox," there is not one false note. The coherence and harmony are absolute. To apply the vulgar and impertinent test of probability is unthinkable. Mrs. Tebrick was changed into a vixen: at first she preserved many of her human characteristics, desiring out of modesty to wear clothes, and continuing to play cards; but gradually the animal nature asserted itself, and poor Mr. Tebrick's love was ever more severely strained, though it never gave way, and at the end his wife died tragically in his arms. We have Mr. Garnett's word for it, in a prose as pure as Addison's; and I am sorry for those who find it difficult to credit.

I confess, not without shame, to having harboured for a moment another interpretation. Might not this brief, haunting, moving tale be after all an allegory? Plato taught something, surely, about the love of the spirit as transcending all merely material considerations? Love, I must have read somewhere, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Is there not, disguised in this fragile and whimsical guise, a new preach-

ing of life's permanent lesson? Is not the pathetic and ridiculous Mr. Tebrick, with his human failings and his divine faith, a symbol of something so profound and touching that it is best told in parable?

Such doubts, I fear, label me a low-brow. To the truly intellectual, the husband of a lady who has turned into a fox is the husband of a lady who has turned into a fox. Symbolism is out of date. Facts are the mode. A work of art is, anyway, its own meaning.

"Can Mr. Garnett do it a second time?" The question was everywhere asked. In "A Man in the Zoo" he has done, not the same thing again, but something equally good. The writing seems a shade less careful, but the understanding of the suffering and loving human heart is as profound, and the humour is as delicate.

Just as people asked whether "Lady into Fox" was allegory, they asked whether Mr. Gerhardi's "Futility" was parody. If it is, it is extravagantly amusing, and if it is not, it is extravagantly amusing. He calls it "a novel on Russian themes," and the complete, the sublime futility of every character in it would force one to the conclusion that those themes were being satirised, if one did not remember

genuine Russian masterpieces in which everybody was equally futile. The scene is laid partly in pre-war Russian society, partly in the Petrograd of the two 1917 revolutions, and partly in the Siberia of the intervention period. One is given a glimpse of Admiral Koltchak. In fact, some of the episodes read like extracts from a notebook—but a notebook of which, in keeping with the rest of the story, the leaves have been disarranged. There is a beautiful irregularity: time, as far as I have been able to make out, works both ways, as in Alice's Looking-Glass world: post-war conditions prevail before the war is over, and the spring is hailed before its preceding November. (If spring comes, can winter be far behind?) Nikolai Vasilievich, a Russian, ostensibly very rich, owner of some mines near Omsk, which are always about to produce a huge fortune, has, roughly speaking, three wives and three daughters—a first wife, Magda Nikolaevna, who refuses to divorce him, and lives with an unsuccessful dentist, Eisenstein, but later changes her mind about the divorce because she wants to marry a Czech, Cecedek; an apparent wife, really his mistress, Fanny Ivanovna; a fiancée, Zina, whom he is to marry as soon as he can get rid of Magda and Fanny, but

who meanwhile lives on him, as do her uncles grandfathers and family generally: and finally three daughters, Sonia, Nina and Vera, about Zina's age (only Vera is not really Nikolai's daughter, but Eisenstein's). And they *all* live on Nikolai, and he for ever borrows money on the strength of the mines which never, never pay. The whole huge conglomeration demonstrates, like some of the folk in Anatole France's "Les Dieux ont Soif," how easy it is to continue engrossed in personal affairs amid the thunder of a revolution. To-and-fro, from Moscow to Petrograd, from Vladivostok to Omsk, these people drift. They darken the world like a swarm of locusts; like chameleons they live upon air. They dance endlessly, they drink wine and tea endlessly, and endlessly, endlessly they talk. It is a nightmare of mines which cannot pay, doctors who cannot practise, lovers who cannot marry, writers who have never been known to write a line, and families which can neither separate nor stop quarrelling while together. "A night of bells and sobs," says the author resignedly. "I wish he'd wash his neck," says Fanny of the Baron who marries her daughter (the daughter is not really her daughter, of course, but then the Baron is not really a Baron). One hurries, blindly but not

unpleasantly, mingling tears and sighs with a vague and stifling multitude, to no goal, with no purpose, through an infinite dark forest that isn't there. And yet the book is a delicious book, uproariously funny, and touched with a wistful, youthful charm.

Mr. Baring has devised a new kind of short novel. His readers must " by indirections find directions out." One of his stories, which is of an involved and delayed love affair, with endless cross-purposes, is told, first, as it appears to a blind man staying at a French watering-place, who is the partial confidant of several actors and spectators of the drama: next, as it is fashioned into a published story by an able but obtuse novelist, one of the spectators, whose immediate comments have already been given in the first part: and lastly, as elucidated in conversation between the blind man and a psychological expert, with the additional light of one or two further facts. And all within two hundred pages of large print! And *then* we are not given any clear solution!

Well, life is admittedly a perplexing business, and no man can read another's heart, or his own. And if the making of imaginary beings " true to life " really depended upon the psychological analysis of motive—the unravelling,

by signs and tokens, of that which *ex hypothesi* is infinitely complicated, and never can be unravelled—then, obviously, we should have no novels worth reading. But that is just what artistic creation does not depend upon. I have always thought that Browning's "Abt Vogler" made an unfair claim for one particular art when he said of music:

> I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
> That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.

The musician frames a star: but so does the painter, the poet, the novelist. "Ye hear how the tale is told," says Browning. But we don't: that is the ultimate mystery of art, and we cannot hear it. Mr. Baring, with his extraordinary fineness of mind and sympathy, his extreme skill, might, by his implied precept, suggest that we *can* hear how the tale is told: but his example teaches better.

Of the above type, roughly, are "Passing By," "Overlooked" and "A Triangle." Then suddenly, tired, one supposes, of brevity, Mr. Baring went to the other extreme and produced "C," which is about twice as long as the ordinary novel. It cannot be called altogether a success. The writing is deliberately undistinguished—perhaps in a vain attempt to keep

up the illusion which the critical apparatus never succeeds in creating (for we are supposed to believe, and do not in fact believe, that " C " was a real person, and that his story has been reconstructed, from memory and those inevitable " papers," by a gentleman called Wright, whose style is nevertheless remarkably like Mr. Baring's). The subtlety lies in the renunciation of comment ; but the formula is only half worked, and only half works. There is the business of removing the story from Mr. Baring's pen to Mr. Wright's : but it comes from Mr. Wright's, after all the preface and to-do, in a somewhat conventional shape. We get, at great length, the ordinary biographical novel ; and even the length is no novelty, for the ordinary biographical novel *is* long, though more often published in two volumes than in one. The detail is conventional and rather dull—preparatory school, Eton, Oxford, diplomacy, journalism, a mild Bohemia. But out of all this we do get a clear picture of " C " himself, his failure to adjust himself to life, his talent, his charm, his inadequacy in love. And I suppose it was to achieve this that Mr. Baring wrote the book.

Princess Bibesco must be added to the brief list of those young contemporary writers whose

first books have brought them fame; but her first book was a collection of short stories—very short stories—and as such will call for mention when that form of art comes to be considered. Here, I am concerned with her novel, which harks back towards the grand tradition, yet remains unclassifiable.

The gentleman, denying himself the short cuts which are open to the cad, feels that he ought to have the monopoly of charm for his reward. But life, though it is a compensating process, does not deal in that sort of compensation: the cad very often takes the short cuts and the charm as well. Indeed, the idea that one thing can in any case "make up" for another is a relic of our childhood, which has not learnt reality, or an anticipation of our second childhood, which will lose it. It may be that to make the best of a bad thing is better than what you would have made of the good. But that is another matter. It is, however, the matter of "The Fir and the Palm."

Princess Bibesco has written a tragedy of incompatibles. Cyril and Christopher love Helen, who loves Toby, who loves nobody. The Fir dreams of the Palm, but cannot mitigate its loneliness. There is nothing to be done about it. The very fact that the people so dis-

tressed by love have every compensating amenity ironically aggravates their malady : there is no change in the pain :

> There were no hardships and no struggles, no physical pains to deaden her mental torture, no work or battle to give her the sense that she was alive. All around her nothing but love and loveliness, friendship and devotion, books and music, leisure and sympathy, flowers and the possibility of helping people a little, and encircling it all a high wall which she had once scaled, breathing the new air, stretching her eyes into the distance over windswept plains and bumping her willing head into reality. How could she go on for years and years with nothing but cushions to plunge into ?

The moralist, of course, will say that she ought to have thrown away the cushions and gone into training. The cynic will suggest that, if books and music and leisure and sympathy —to say nothing of lunch and dinner—are not a compensation for a starved passion, they are at any rate an exceedingly acceptable distraction from it—more acceptable, merely *as* distractions, than physical pains and work and battle :

> Seared is (of course) my heart—but unsubdued
> Is, and shall be, my appetite for food.

Benedick said that he would never lose more blood with love than he would get again with

drinking: but he scarcely lived up to his cynical pretensions. More adequate is the realist, who will ask, to the amazement and indignation of the romantic, whether there is anything to be tolerated in this business of unrequited love after all; whether love is not a harmony, of which neither half can exist without the other; and whether the heart that craves for the heart that feels no reciprocal craving is not, in truth, worshipping, instead of an existing beloved, simply its own shadow —as sick of self-love as Malvolio. But to such argument one must reply, in the words of the devil: "It's pretty, but is it art?" The theory that human beings would be happier if they were more altruistic is probably untrue and certainly irrelevant. Yet it is always a tribute to a book when one feels impelled to judge its characters as irrelevantly as, alas, one too often judges real people.

Say Helen *was* fallible—what then? Her creator is not giving her a character for a situation: her situations *are* her character. It is no use going to a man who is wearing out his soul in prison and telling him that it is his own fault; that he ought to rise superior to his environment; and that, anyway, he has regular meals. The implacable tragedy remains.

People suffer, and art can allow no extenuation of their suffering. The interpretation has got to be sought and found in this very denial of extenuation. Princess Bibesco lives up unflinchingly, in this book, to that hard and high law.

And so, at last, to those two rare artists, Mrs. Woolf and Mr. Forster. I do not propose to examine any one of Mrs. Woolf's books in detail, for a detailed examination would stress those gaps and descents which, though no doubt a considered and integral part of her method, seem to me merely blemishes: and I recognise that her genius is of an order to render its own blemishes comparatively unimportant. To be so clever, in a world where almost everybody is clever and cleverness doesn't matter: to allow oneself a sort of humorous indulgence towards one's creations, and to leave the simple-minded reader guessing at connexions which might just as well be made clear for him—all this is a positive injury to art; but somehow it matters more at the moment than in retrospect: what endures in memory are the passages of sheer lyrical beauty. I recall one in particular, from "Jacob's Room," about crossing Waterloo Bridge in a wind: it makes us feel what Mrs. Woolf herself calls

" the ecstasy and hubbub of the soul." Whereas so many writers who are " different " seem to be merely straining away from the conventional in their originality, Mrs. Woolf transcends it easily: she has a running lyric strain that lifts the heart.

The fairies showered gifts on Mr. Forster; sympathy, wit, knowledge, charm; but an impudent fairy came at the end and made him whimsical. Lovely as his work is, it remains at one remove from life. In " Howard's End," for instance, he asks us to accept the most blazing impossibilities; and so engaging is his manner, so exquisite his style, that he almost induces us to do so. But not quite. It would not matter if his whole strain were fantastic; he should touch earth more often, or less. This defect is apparent even in " A Passage to India," which most people have accepted as his masterpiece.

To that portion of the novel-reading public which takes the novel as a form of art and not merely as a form of dissipation, the publication of a new book by Mr. Forster is probably the event of the year. He would, indeed, be the best of the younger novelists, if he were a novelist at all. But his medium is really the fairy-story; for in a fairy-story the characters

may be as thin and faint and fantastic as you please, or as Mr. Forster pleases, and yet the enchantment will remain.

No doubt "A Passage to India" has been given a deliberately misleading title. There is nothing in it about the passage to India in the ordinary sense of the words: all the action passes *in* India: and the passage is of the spirit. The weakness is that Mr. Forster cannot lodge his spirits in human bodies. He can give them every finest shade of feeling and perception; he can mercilessly record their language, their thoughts, even the hinterland of their thoughts; but he cannot make them come alive. His wealth of wit and poetry is marred, or at any rate limited, by something between pity and contempt for that witless and unpoetic race, the human. It is clear that he does not like either Indians or Anglo-Indians: not that he dislikes them *as* Indians or Anglo-Indians, but that he sees them involved in the vast purposeless sufferings and pathetic-comic enjoyments of man. Is his book a contribution to the "problem" of India? Not specifically. One gathers that for him there is only one problem in the world, and that insoluble.

He does not regard it as possible that the Englishman should understand the Moslem or

the Hindu, or the Hindu and the Moslem understand the Englishman or each other: he does not think it possible that one human being should understand another human being. His people of each several race are as much at cross-purposes among themselves as with the people of other races. It is true that occasionally he is tempted into cheap generalisations, but only when he has lost touch with his own theme. "Like most Orientals, Aziz overrated hospitality, mistaking it for intimacy, and not seeing that it is tainted with the sense of possession." A moment's thought or five minutes spent in the bar of a public-house would have enabled Mr. Forster to write "like most Occidentals" there. The human heart, capable of very little intimacy and hungry for more, is always and everywhere parading hospitality in its place. "What's yours?" and "Have one with me" are not peculiarly oriental expressions. Again:

> Suspicion in the Oriental is a sort of malignant tumour, a mental malady, that makes him self-conscious and unfriendly suddenly; he trusts and mistrusts at the same time in a way the Westerner cannot comprehend. It is his demon, as the Westerner's is hypocrisy.

If Mr. Forster will re-read his own book

(which I confidently recommend to him), he will find the East just as hypocritical as the West, and the West just as suspicious as the East. These be the maladies of flesh-and-blood.

Dr. Aziz, a Mohammedan surgeon and poet, makes the acquaintance of Mrs. Moore in a mosque. She has thoughtfully removed her shoes, which delights him: she talks to him as to an equal, which delights him more: she understands what he is talking about, which delights him most of all. But hence tragedy, or the inept and ungraceful antics of pain which life sometimes offers us in place of the tragic dignity. Mrs. Moore is an old lady, mother of the City Magistrate of Chandrapore: she has come out to visit him, and to chaperone Miss Quested, the plain young woman whom he is vaguely supposed to be going to marry. Aziz plans a picnic at the Marabar Caves, twenty miles out of the city: by a series of accidents, he is left alone with Miss Quested near the caves: he goes into one, she into another: and she comes out insane, alleging that he followed her in and insulted her. What exactly did happen in the cave we are never told: a heavy veil of mystery hangs over all. But the incident, the subsequent arrest and

trial, let loose two conflicting storms of racial passion, and the excitement comes to a climax in court, when Miss Quested recovers sufficient sanity to withdraw her charge. This is the central theme of a long story, of which the details are more important than the centre. For neither Miss Quested nor Dr. Aziz has any separate life. Their fortunes, their thoughts, might have been written down about anybody; but by no one except Mr. Forster could they have been written down with such delicacy, such restraint, such an indulgent tone of romance redeemed from horror by humour. It is no hyperbole to say that almost every sentence is a work of art. "He was pleasant and patient, and evidently understood why she did not understand. He implied that he had once been as she, but not for long." "She owed him an explanation, but unfortunately there was nothing to explain." "They were softened by their own honesty, and began to feel lonely and unwise." The story is built up out of thousands of such touches, malicious or delicious. And in the "big scenes," the descriptive power, the narrative power, are terrific. To call the book "good" would be a ludicrous understatement: over and over again, as one reads, one thinks: "This is great"; and

yet the total effect is not of greatness, in the sense in which one predicates greatness of great novels. The real, some philosophers tell us, speaking truth, is the individual : in other words, the answer to that insoluble problem of Mr. Forster's is the problem itself, presented concretely in the shape of men and women : great art, in the narrative or dramatic form, gives us reassurance by its sheer power of creation : and it is through this one lack that all Mr. Forster's dazzling and baffling wisdom leaves us only dazzled and baffled.

VII

THE SHORT STORY

"MAY I be found worthy to do it! Lord, make me crystal clear for Thy light to shine through!" In that supplication Katherine Mansfield revealed the method of her art. We know that at the end of her short life she was dissatisfied with an achievement which to many people seemed the most notable of her generation; she was dissatisfied with her achievement because she was dissatisfied with herself; so purely was she an artist, and an artist of genius, that for her the problem of living and the problem of writing were one; her living was to be the instrument of her inspiration, the clear window through which the divine light was to shine. All the self-critical notes in her journal tell, from one angle or another, the same tale.

It is generally idle to discuss what a writer *might* have done; but these self-judgments of

Katherine Mansfield throw a light on what she actually did. By concentration, by dedication, she made something of an almost perfect beauty. Any study of the contemporary short story, if we rule out the elder masters such as Mr. Kipling, is bound to begin with her name.

And the revelation of her struggles is peculiarly enlightening, because it enables us to understand that special quality of coolness and adequacy which distinguishes her art from that of almost all, even the most brilliant, of her fellows. Most of them strive and cry, but strive after the making of something different from that which others have made, and cry for the deluding moon. Too often the indirect approach is chosen because—consciously or unconsciously—the writer is afraid of the comparison with the masters to which a direct approach would expose him. Katherine Mansfield was concerned, not with comparison, but with that positive which in art is the superlative; she was concerned solely with the thing she had to say, and strove only for the simplest, clearest way of saying it. That is why even her most tragic stories—and her best stories, like all the best stories in the world, and all the best plays and poems, *are* tragic—are bathed in a calm light of compre-

hension. Without underrating the exquisiteness of those longer stories in which little happens because atmosphere and emotion are all, I should judge the two most moving things she ever did to be "Ma Parker" and "The Doll's House." Both are pictures of dazed innocence suffering beneath the hammer-blows of an incomprehensibly cruel fate; both are lifted out of sordidness into beauty by their tragic truthfulness; and in both, but in "The Doll's House" more than in the other, the innocence in its own divine and secret fashion triumphs over the cruelty. "I seen the little lamp," says "our Else." It is one of the permanent sayings.

It would be easy to exaggerate the merits of this apparent perfection. Even the approximation to the perfect is never attained, by any but the very greatest, save within narrow limits; and Katherine Mansfield's limits were unquestionably narrow. She had no wide range of either theme or manner; she never scaled, she never attempted, those heights on which emotion attains universality by surpassing possibility. Yet she is an immortal.

This combination of narrowness and adequacy (where adequacy means beauty) raises the question of what it is that we demand from

the short story. Is it " the sting in the tail " ? I doubt it. The sting in the tail is a very effective, sometimes a devastatingly effective, device ; but a device it is—perfectly legitimate, frequently desirable, sometimes essential to the due development of a grand theme, but also sometimes to be found apart from any grandeur of theme whatever. Guy de Maupassant is praised for his use of it, and, indeed, nobody need seek to better that use ; but he could dispense with it easily when he chose, and without losing anything of his quality. Again, the mere word " short " raises certain external difficulties. How can one compare stories of the length of Mr. Conrad's " Tales of Unrest " with those of the length of Ambrose Bierce's " In the Midst of Life " ? The form is necessarily quite different. But such difficulties, being on the face of them incapable of precise solution, must be swept aside. I define a short story as a story not long enough to be called a novel.

I have once or twice ventured in print the opinion that the two best short stories I know are " La Maison Tellier " and Alexander Kuprin's " Captain Ribnikov." About the former I suppose there would be general agreement ; the latter is not so familiar. " Crainque-

bille " cannot come far behind. But what of short stories in English? I have read that Wandering Willie's tale in " Redgauntlet " is the best of all—though perhaps English is too poor a word for the language of it. But I hesitate over it. It lacks unity, inevitability. Its extraordinary effect of grandeur is analysable, I believe, as due to the lift and lilt of the sentences rather than to that *action* which Matthew Arnold rightly demanded in a poem (and it is by much the same canons as poetry that this art of the narrative is to be judged). Dickens and Thackeray needed the larger canvas for their best; indeed, it is as we get nearer to our own time that the practice of the briefer forms becomes not only commoner but more careful. Stevenson comes near the top; and Mr. Conrad; and assuredly Mr. Kipling; and Mr. Nevinson, whose " A Don's Day " has the authentic note of immortality. But none of these are newcomers; I am inclined to think that Katherine Mansfield was leading her own generation.

Mr. Joyce comes up for mention again here, with his " Dubliners "; and Miss Tennyson Jesse; and Mr. Stacy Aumonier, a most skilful fashioner; and Mr. Aldous Huxley, whose short stories, as we have seen, are even

finer than his novels. Most critics would say the same, I do not doubt, of Mr. C. E. Montague; but "A Hind let Loose" dwells in my memory as so exquisite an example of ironic wit schooled by scholarship that I hesitate to think even "Fiery Particles" better. Still, "Fiery Particles" must rank among the most finely wrought of contemporary short stories. Of course, if you do not like the pose, the poise, the manner, the deliberate and challenging self-consciousness, there is nothing more to be said: Mr. Montague will never be an author of universal popularity. Moreover, he is, for so careful, so really exquisite an artist, strangely unequal: the satiric part of "Fiery Particles" seems to me on an altogether inferior level to the rest. The war-stories are grimly fantastic and deeply moving.

I wish I could linger over Mr. Barry Pain's brilliant wit and exemplary control of technique; but he is of too old-established a reputation. Mr. Thomas Burke is still a young man, but he too has learnt his craft thoroughly: his obvious weakness is his singleness of note. His technique becomes, after a little while, rather mechanical; he sounds hyperbolical and hysterical. But then his extravagant themes are in key with hyperbole

and hysteria ; his Limehouse, I would warrant, never was on sea or land, and his verbal excesses do not betray his meaning, but express it, though the meaning itself is rarely important. He has power because he has imagination. Mr. O'Flaherty, a very new writer indeed, has published two or three short stories of a much greater power, because of a larger imagination : they led me at first to believe that we were going to hail a new master, but he has diverged into the novel, and has yet to show that he can in that form attain the same level.

Miss Evelyn Sharp's terrible " A Million a Day," in her collection called " The War of all the Ages," is one of those works of pure inspiration which, once read, remain vital in the mind for ever.

I can find little but praise for Mr. Coppard's conscious simplicity : it has the poetic touch, but sometimes it seems to wanton away from the austerity without which it would have no status at all. Mr. Coppard is something of a genius, but he has moments of prettiness. To Mr. Neil Lyons, I think, justice has never been done. He is very uneven, but at his best he expresses, with rare economy, a fine and generous reading of life ; he carries the dry irony of Cockney wit to the point of poetry :

he gives you moments of the laughter which is indistinguishable from the very sharpness of sympathetic indignation. The contrast between the subjectivity, the dreaminess, of the former, and the hard bright objectivity of the latter, is an excellent lesson in modernity; for both are very "modern."

The essential reason why one feels that Mr. Coppard is arriving, that he matters, is that he is so richly, tragically, humorously himself. There is no room for the suspicion that he writes from anything but an overpowering impulse, not merely to write, but to write just so. His style is curious and, in an age which might seem to have exhausted experiment, new. It tumbles over itself; it is rapid, genial, like the talk of a man whimsical, eloquent and earnest. Take his collection called "The Black Dog." In "The Handsome Lady" he walks securely with omens and portents; in "The Ballet Girl" he describes college doings which surely never happened in any mortal college; but, for the most part and the best, he keeps to country folk and country ways and simple human encounters. Once, and only once, I suspected that sentimentality was coming, with the first paragraph of "The Fancy Dress Ball":

> There was a young fellow named Bugloss. He wore cuff links made of agate with studs to match, but was otherwise an agreeable person who suffered much from a remarkable diffidence, one of nature's minor inconsistencies having been to endow him with a mute desire for romantic adventure and an entire incapacity to inaugurate any such thing.

This seems to me bad writing. It is laboured without being polished, facetious without being funny. But the evil, I thought, lay deeper. I thought we were in for the old fable of the shy and almost imbecile young man who is suddenly swept into romance by the dashing beauty. (I prefer the gipsy on the moor.) But I was wrong; the diffident young man continues to be diffident, and the dashing beauties pass him by. Moreover, the patch of bad writing that I have quoted is the only bad thing in these eighteen stories; it is a lapse for which we can be almost grateful, so sharply does it throw up into contrast the excellence of the rest. Here, from the brief and tragic "Mordecai and Cocking," which illustrates the cruelty of fate without gesticulating over it, is a passage vivid and rapid with the very sense of what it tells:

> Cocking, unseen, near the beeches released his dog. The doe shot away over the curve of the hill

and was gone. She did not merely gallop, she seemed to pass into ideal flight, the shadow of wind itself. Her fawn body, with half-cocked ears and unperceivable convulsion of the leaping haunches, soared across the land with the steady swiftness of a gull. The interloping hare, in a blast of speed, followed hard upon her traces. But Cocking's hound had found at last the hare of its dreams, a nut-brown, dark-eared, devil-guided, eluding creature, that fled over the turf of the hill as lightly as a cloud. The long leaping dog swept in its track with a stare of passion, following in great curves the flying thing that grew into one great throb of fear all in the grand sunlight on the grand bit of a hill. The lark stayed its little flood of joy and screamed with notes of pity at the protracted flight; and bloodless indeed were they who could view it unmoved, nor feel how sweet a thing is death if you be hound, how fell a thing it is if you be hare. Too long, O delaying death, for this little heart of wax; and too long, O delaying victory, for that pursuer with the mouth of flame.

"The Black Dog" itself, the first story, tells how the Honourable Gerald Loughlin fell in love with the daughter of an innkeeper. He was mild and introspective, she too strong of will and subtle of mind and careless of body for him to understand. It is a tale all of moods and raptures and misunderstandings, as silvery and baffling as an autumn day in mist, with

one ugly tragic fact sticking up in it like a leafless tree. Style, knowledge of character, originality of theme and method—Mr. Coppard has them all.

Mr. Neil Lyons—at his best, as in "Arthur's" and "Sixpenny Pieces" and "Moby Lane and Thereabouts"—is almost my favourite author; for he is (the sentences to run concurrently) a "low, vulgar fellow" and a man of genius. There are poets who are not humorists, and humorists who are not poets, but in Mr. Lyons the two qualities meet. There is a third quality, here as inextricably mixed with these two as these two with each other. I do not know whether Mr. Neil Lyons regards himself as a Christian, and it would be impertinent to enquire. But if Christianity means an absolute lack of pharisaism, a complete acceptance of the saying, "Judge not that ye be not judged," an artless, unself-conscious, unsentimental realisation of fellow-creatures as fellow-creatures, then Mr. Neil Lyons is a Christian by virtue of the same gifts as make him a humorist and a poet. If you are out of conceit with humanity—and to be so is the prevalent malady of this setting part of time—he will cure you.

Take this, from "Moby Lane":

If you want to know who or what the Mobies are, they are a man and wife, properly authenticated, under nuptial law, with a seven-and-sixpenny licence, and with power to add to their number. They add to it yearly. . . .

By profession Mr. Moby is a licensed pedlar, travelling (with a perambulator) in rabbit skins, bottles, rags, bones, etc. Mrs. Moby's one quarrel with Fate is that she has to bear and rear her numerous progeny without a roof over her head. She does not want a roof *qua* roof, but she does want the insignia of respectability —" if it's on'y to git upsides o' that sister o' mine—'er what's married the railwayman."

" All right, mother ! " cried Mr. Moby. " We've heerd all that before. Don't overcome the gentleman. Tie up number seven, now. Put the little Moby in the fuzz. And give the gentleman a cup o' tea. And all you little Mobies, there ; stop blowin' on they whistles. There's a chap in that halder bush as can whistle better nor you."

All the little Mobies put their pipes away. All the little Mobies cocked their ears, standing barefoot on the flint. The artist on the alder bough put up his throat, and sang. He sang that little old thing of his in F :—" Did he do it ? Did he do it ? "

" Yes, he did ! " cried all the little Mobies in reply : " Yes, he did ! Yes, he did ! "

Oh, they lifted the latch of my heart !

There is a wonderful study of Mr. Rummery's education in the meaning of Socialism.

> "See," continued Mr. Rummery, producing a crumpled page of his precious "Magaphone." . . . "See! Look at this a-here: a man aren't got to be a sc'olar to find out the meanin' o' this a-here. There's the pore children, lyin' cold and 'ungry in their bed; there's the pore mother gatherin' up their le'l bits o' clothes to take away and sell. . . . And there be a picture o' these a-here miner chaps, what woon't goo to work. There they be a-feedin' o' their dargs on steak and whiskey. . . . 'Tis all told so plain in these a-here pictures. Words bean't no use to a old man off the land."

This lesson in the effects of Socialism is superseded by Mr. Rummery's visit to his son in London. He comes back dazed.

> "That be a queer set-out, this Socialism," said Mr. Rummery. "Naarthun' to eat on'y bean and pips; naarthun' to drink on'y barley-water. . . . You aren't got to go to no theatres, nor you aren't got to go to no pictures. . . . They be agin all readin' too—on'y this a-here." Mr. Rummery produced from his pocket a slender pamphlet bound in green paper.
>
> Its title was: "Fabian Tract, No. 40."

And here follows the third lesson:

> . . . I went to a cupboard . . . and brought forth clean clay pipes, some good tobacco, and a

bottle full of—sin. "This also is Socialism," I remarked.

"Is it, now!" cried Mr. Rummery, looking very glad. "God love us all!"

It would be easy to add names, but an unjust line of exclusion must somewhere be drawn, and I degenerate into a catalogue because there is no new principle of classification to apply. I believe that here the main cleavage I traced in the contemporary novel is obvious again, as it is in poetry; I believe it to be inevitable in the arts, because I find in it a correspondence to the lives we live and the thoughts we think in this place of ours in history. It would be tedious to attempt the application of the formula to fiction of each separate kind. And if the short story writers fit it, anyway, less completely than the novelists, that is because the form has, in English, less tradition behind it, and so there is less temptation to diverge. I have kept to the last the writer who best illustrates that point. Princess Bibesco, as has been said, began with short stories; they were brilliant and pregnant—witty, not with the glitter of occasional verbal allusion, but with that constant, steady pressure of imaginative understanding which reveals and creates. She, too, was, in no bad sense, narrow of range; not

altogether narrow, since her preoccupation was with the passion of love, a tolerably wide matter; but narrow in the sense that her scenes, her settings, her ways of approach, her sharp moments of joy or pain, all had a strong family resemblance one to another. But they were her own; they ignored tradition; they were superficially, as well as profoundly, original. She has gone on from the short to the long; and she has improved in the going. Only—and this is the point—in the novel, she has turned back towards tradition, as instinctively, as eagerly, as an exile turns towards home. And it is sheer gain. Losing some of the superficial originality, she has deepened the profound. For a pure tradition, like a faith, like a cause, gives back enriched the beauty that it takes.

VIII

"BEST-SELLERS"

SALES have a double influence on literature: they provide not only the author's bread-and-butter, but also in a sense the medium of his art. This is a hard saying, but we cannot escape from it. Though there is, of course, no relation whatever between individual merit and individual success, the general taste and temper which invite, provoke, encourage, and therefore to some extent direct the writer's efforts are in their turn formed by the nature of the writings they have accepted already. If you write anything worth while, you do so in the first place, certainly, to the glory of God, but in the second place for the circulating libraries; and is it not a preposterous pharisaism to suppose that God is less concerned with novel-readers than with sparrows? If it has been given to you to speak, you are to suppose it has been given to others to hear. An author

who shut up his masterpiece in a drawer for ever would be as mad with pride as Lucifer. And the "best-seller's" part in the literary organism is not merely to indicate, but also to provide, the public to whom you must appeal. Of course, if the public stops its ears, that is quittance to your conscience; you may conceivably be too good for it; but you must not deny it the opportunity of being good enough for you. I do not myself believe much in the comforting theory that posterity is always in the right, and that the reputation neglected to-day will necessarily be established at the end of some vista of to-morrows; it is true that in the long run—the very long run, the run of many centuries—a general tribute is accorded to those worthy reputations *which have survived to get it*; but we can never know how many have literally perished of neglect. No; that is not the line of assurance. And why should you expect it? Every day, somewhere, good soldiers, sailors, tinkers and tailors by the fantastic tricks of fortune die unrecognised; why not good poets and good novelists? To deserve a posthumous fame is much; to expect to receive it as well is excessive. But all the same you must write for as large a circulation, present and future, as you can win without compromise

or concession; and how large that will be depends on the kind and the range of the public's appreciations; and that in turn on what the public is accustomed to read.

No critical survey of a period's literature, then, can neglect the popular successes. What is it that makes extreme popularity? The sales of Mr. Wells or Mr. Bennett, famous as those authors are, can scarcely rival the sales of Miss Dell or Mr. Hutchinson; and Miss Hull's " The Sheikh " is stated to have gone into over a hundred editions. Yet Mr. Wells and Mr. Bennett are not merely, to put it mildly, good writers; they apply amazing gifts of clarity and effectiveness to matters of common knowledge and general interest; whereas Mr. Hutchinson and the Misses Dell and Hull are—shall we say, less good?—and do not seem at first sight to treat subjects any more generally interesting, or to do so with anything like the same economy and concentration.

And, incidentally, though there is a Shakespeare in almost every house in the country, are there as many people who have read and enjoyed " Hamlet " as there are people who have read and enjoyed " If Winter Comes "? We shall never know. But I doubt it.

Here is our problem. Let me lay down two

laws about it. Firstly, great popular success is very rarely found unassociated with definite narrative skill. Secondly, there must be some one quality to be discerned in the characteristic best-sellers of any given period. (But this need not be a *literary* quality.)

Mrs. Henry Wood, whose total sales, I believe, ran into millions, was a very skilful writer. Mrs. Humphry Ward, not in her latter years, when her invention was exhausted, but in the days when she wrote " Robert Elsmere," was a very good writer indeed, and, of course, at a level much higher than Mrs. Henry Wood's —but it is not the level of ideal that we are considering, it is the technical competence *at* the level chosen. Miss Dell, again, is an excellent craftswoman ; she knows how to tell a story. Mr. Hutchinson has narrative-passages which are positively exciting, and some genuine humour and pathos. And Miss Hull (I hope I am right in calling her " Miss ") has dexterity. The late Mr. Garvice I never read, but I am told his competence, within its limits, was notable. The late Mr. Nat Gould I did once try to read, and he makes a difficulty. I am given to understand that his popularity was—and presumably is still—the greatest of all. He wrote an incredible number of books, and they

all sold to an incredible number of copies. A friend of mine who ran a library in connection with a military hospital during the war told me that most of the patients, if they could not have a Nat Gould, would have nothing. Fired by this improbable story, and perhaps by a faint hope of some secret emanation from the spirit of my distinguished namesake (for might there not be something in a name, after all ?), I began one of his books. I did not get far with it, and I never for a moment felt that I would have nothing if I could not have that. But perhaps I had fallen upon one of his lesser works—his " Rokeby," as it were, or his " Pericles." And perhaps his popularity was one of subject rather than of treatment, for there are some subjects so enthralling as to transcend any treatment, bad or good. Perhaps his stories sold because they were about horse-racing, as " Robert Elsmere " sold because it was about intellectual doubt.

To come to the second point. Mr. Barry Pain put his finger on the fascination of " If Winter Comes " when he said of its hero : " Favourite recreation, suffering." So of Miss Dell's stern warriors and Miss Hull's alarming chiefs. " Favourite recreations, being grim and proud ; subduing women." We do not

like to suffer in life, because there we cannot have the prestige without the inconvenience; but—"How sickness enlarges the dimensions of a man's self to himself!" as Lamb said. To be ill in bed, which is all that Lamb was thinking of, is well enough in its way; but to be sick in the soul, to suffer because we are of too fine a clay to wring good fortune from a gross world, to be *misunderstood*—that surely would be the crown of self-love and fine flower of felicity, if only we could enjoy at the same time the goods we forfeited. That is why we like to read about Mark Sabre. Our favourite recreation is vicarious suffering. And it so happens that the vices of Mr. Hutchinson's style eke out his theme no less than do its virtues; its ingenuous pretentiousness, its awful solemnity and still more awful archness, flatter the reader's self-love a second time, by making him believe he is enjoying good literature. Our pride of emotion and our pride of *æsthetic* emotion are simultaneously excited, and to do that for us is an achievement.

The early pages of "This Freedom" are much the best thing Mr. Hutchinson has done. They have real humour, observation, feeling; and their style suits them. But the plot runs away into absurdity. And even odder are the

short stories collected under the title "The Eighth Wonder." Everybody knows that words in their wrong order constitute style: here is a still loftier touch. A reviewer of Byron's tragedies once affirmed that he could chop up the noble poet's prose prefaces into quite as good verse as could be found in the tragedies themselves; and he printed a bit of preface in lengths to prove it. Here is a genuine unedited piece of Mr. Hutchinson similarly treated—the difference between prose and poetry being, as some one has said, that poetry is smooth along only one edge and prose along both:

. . . to individual hopes and fears
And faiths and loves (the world's high holiday).
They all are wonderful. There is, as out
They come and shining home they go, no man
They pass—not all your savants or your laurelled—
Can of his powers give to weariness
What of their graces these can give; can of
His brain or of his hands bequeath mankind
What of their bodies these, its mothers pre-
Ordained, maintaining it, bequeath it. All
Lovely, all wonderful; and loveliest
And wondrous most that one, as often I
Have seen, who to a lover waiting there
Emerges . . .

Happy Mr. Hutchinson, who perhaps all his life has been talking poetry without knowing it!

The Sheikh-affair is to be explained in the same way as the popularity of those who, like Brer Tarrypin, are engaged in " lounjun 'roun', en suffer'n'." The overwhelming majority of us in our private lives are meek and timid, and, if we met beautiful women in the midst of Arabian deserts, would do nothing more violent than blush ; but we are all dare-devils in our day-dreams. It is true that Miss Dell, though milder than Miss Hull, is somewhat crude and obvious in her conception of domination ; I retain from the perusal of several of her books a general vague impression that somebody is often pounding somebody else into a pulp ; but what would you ? That is only the fleshly symbol ; it is the spirit that counts. Not the poor pulping, but the high romantic gesture, the assertion of the Right to Pulp—or, alternatively, to be pulped—is the secret of Miss Dell's merited popularity.

So we find the same simple explanation—that we look inward rather than outward—awaiting the self-consciously exquisite and the broadly popular. It is indeed because of this that we can be assured they have both gone wrong. Æsthetic appreciation is a nobler creature, and requires solider food, than scientific analysis. It must have the reality, not the

shadow. Casting our eyes across the broad range of contemporary literature, we learn the same lesson at each extremity.

Yet, so far as the psychological explanation *has* æsthetic validity, it was anticipated in the most famous sentence of Aristotle. " By arousing pity and fear, to accomplish the purgation of such emotions "—that is tragedy's specific function ; but the idea behind the words can be applied to something less than tragedy. " Favourite recreation—suffering " : the appeal is bad only when it is addressed to vanity, not when it is addressed to sympathy ; and the crudest popular success must owe at least part of its successfulness to a sort of parody or imitation of the tragic appeal. The difference is this—that tragedy is bracing and sentimentality is mawkish. But that element in human nature which responds to the sentimentality is not altogether to be contemned. It is inadequate rather than evil. Properly developed, it may yet respond to tragic beauty ; and people may start reading " Hamlet."

IX

CONCLUSION

CRITICISM must discern the tendencies and appraise the individuals; what it must not do is to force the individuals under headings which do not fit them, for the sake of giving to itself an artificial air of completeness and precision. If one were to treat tendencies only, there would be no room for the rare and the startling; if one were to go by authors, there would be no coherence in the general view. Looking back over my survey of contemporary fiction, I am acutely afflicted by a sense of the injustice done to one author or another; yet without the injustice, the task could scarcely have been performed at all. A certain breadth of treatment, a certain disregard of special claims, is involved in the attempt to estimate any general development, and it is with the general development that I have been concerned. But let me not conclude without apologies.

To begin with, who was to be treated at all, as a mere matter of dates, and who not? A dividing year had to be chosen, and I chose the turn of the century. Roughly speaking (and I was bound to speak roughly), this temporal division corresponded with a division between the reputations already for good or ill established, and those still in the making. When I have mentioned a writer whose first novel was published before 1900, it has in almost all cases been in illustration of a special point, or by way of contrast with the newcomers. It was entirely outside my purpose to attempt a new estimate of authors so famous and so familiar as, say, Mr. Wells and Mr. Bennett; yet, because of their influence on younger folk, they could not be omitted altogether. There are many others of that generation over whom it would have been pleasant to linger; let me name but a few, in admiration rather than in criticism, to mark comparison and change. There is Mr. Somerset Maugham, whose novels for the most part lack the bright wit of his plays, but show a sombre power streaked with something like horror. I must pay tribute to the nobly adequate art of Mr. E. V. Lucas, "the world's uncle." Who will forget the colour and romance of Mr. Hewlett's early

work? Memory links for me Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins's "Quisanté" with Harold Frederic's "The Market-Place"; fine as both those works are, however, they were not their authors' best. Which of our bright young things, genuinely witty though they be, can rival the "Dolly Dialogues"? None. ("Saki" came nearest, but there was less humanity in his wit. His "Unbearable Bassington"—well-named, since both its brilliance and its poignancy are almost past bearing—found the public more unappreciative than one would have thought possible.) Who now reads Harold Frederic's "Illumination"—a great book? It is not easy to think of Mr. Eden Phillpotts, Mr. Pett Ridge, Mr. Edwin Pugh, as veterans; they all go back beyond my prescribed year, but Mr. Phillpotts tries ever new paths, Mr. Pett Ridge perseveres, miraculously without repetition or monotony, on the one path he has chosen, and Mr. Pugh at moments challenges comparison with the new schools on their own ground. Mr. Allan Monkhouse has not obtained wide enough recognition for his uncompromising devotion to the sternest demands of art, nor Mr. Cunninghame Graham for his irony and romance. Mr. Leonard Merrick is, within narrow bounds, nearly perfect: gentle,

wistful, but unsentimental. As for Mr. Ford Madox Ford, he is the jolliest and subtlest of *les jeunes*, though nearly in his thirtieth year of authorship. Mr. William de Morgan had learned the mournful wisdom of old age before he "commenced novelist"—happily, he had not lost the sweet simplicity of youth. If we had to decide who was the greatest woman writer of the day, might not the choice fall either on Miss Elizabeth Robins, for the force of "The Magnetic North" and "Where Are You Going To?"—or on Miss Anne Douglas Sedgwick, whose "Valerie Upton" is of an almost Meredithian discrimination? But they both fall outside my subject; and so does the strange genius of Miss Violet Hunt.

I must call a halt; at any rate we have been in company for a few moments with those whom the younger generation must admit to be in many ways its betters. But there is still mention to be made of a few among the younger writers who, by the very nature of their sharply individual gifts, can fit no formula. Mr. O'Donovan constrains a passionate energy in the bonds of a quiet efficiency. I must not forget Mr. Patrick McGill's brave realism, lifted into poetry, nor the less obvious, but no less poignant, realism of "Herbert Tremaine."

Miss G. B. Stern showed extraordinary promise in " A Marrying Man " ; she has not yet fulfilled it. Mrs. Mary Webb, a writer capable of deeply moving tragedy, is too little known. For the deep-cutting wit that passes imperceptibly into pathos, we have Miss Stella Benson. Mr. James Stephens, undeniably a man of genius and a poet, baffles admiration by a frequent triviality.

I know that from this list I have, through ignorance, omitted many worthy names. But I could not attempt even the mention of all good contemporary writers. My purpose has been specific ; to discern the main tendencies, to criticise the works which best illustrate those tendencies, and not, more than I could help, to overlook those other works which do not yet seem to belong here or there, but must, because of their intrinsic merits, belong *somewhere*. For ignorance, indeed, one can offer no excuse. But consider—

Since 1900 there must have been published far more than twenty thousand novels. No man could read them all ; if he did, a new spate of fiction would foam and swirl round him while he was at the task, and he would never catch up. Selection, both voluntary and involuntary, there is bound to be. And it is bound to involve injustice.

Yet of my main classification I have no doubts, nor of the importance of the subject. I hear people decry fiction. "Give us real life," they say; and they read history. And they ought to read history, but not to have left the other undone. For in the profound æsthetic sense, as we have seen, the distinction is illusory. Your history and your novel are alike imaginative reconstructions of reality, and that is their common glory. No records will convince us, unless the heart is convinced.

The modern development of introspection must be judged, too, by that test of whether it does or does not convince the heart. I have not suggested that introspection in itself, as an artistic rather than a voluptuous exercise, must be morbid; I am sure that in its contemporary manifestations it is at least leaning towards an excess which means falsity. The morbid is all right as a theme, but not as an attitude. We have, for sanity, to get away from the idea that the unity of existence lies in the individual itinerant soul, and to understand that we are all members one of another. It is not the "hero" who makes the heroic.

My own belief is that out of the stress and somewhat incoherent experimentalism of to-day we shall get, over and above the excellence of

separate achievements, an addition to our range, an enlarged knowledge of life, with which to enrich the old tradition; but that the old tradition will endure triumphant. We need not shrink from repetition. Situations recur in life and therefore must recur in books. What nothing can guarantee, but what an honest criticism may hope to subserve, is a high standard of individual service to the novel-writer's art. Few arts are higher; none give greater delight. At its best, this form of creation is indeed one with poetry; at anything short of its worst, it may give the healing of distraction to the tormented spirit. Creation for consolation is divine; and, to compass it, you must love your fellows and understand them. There is no end to the virtue of a story about people that live; the story's the thing, and that is why the tradition endures. Give thanks and honour then to the story-teller who carries it on, that "with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney-corner."

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